

# **ALBANIAN INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

## **Albania and European Union: Perceptions and Realities 2006**

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## INTRODUCTION

During the period July-August 2006, the European Program of the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) carried out the fourth annual survey on Albanians' knowledge of the European Union (EU) and its institutions as well as their perceptions on the country's progress towards EU membership. AIIS continued its targeted approach by surveying five target groups: public administration, local government administration in ten major Albanian municipalities,<sup>1</sup> media, NGOs, and businesses. The five categories were administered the same questionnaire and surveying techniques as in past *Perceptions and Realities* surveys in order to monitor the dynamics of change over time on the level of knowledge and perceptions of the integration process.<sup>2</sup>

The survey was carried out immediately after the signing of the SAA on June 12 2006 in order to find out how "vulnerable" public opinion is to such an event. Given that the signing of the SAA in Albania was celebrated with great pomp by the government, our research team wanted to find out whether Albanians' perceptions of the integration process had changed radically. Our hypothesis is that if public opinion became significantly more optimistic, Albania's integration process was based on vague perceptions rather than firm knowledge and understanding of the country's European road. On the other hand, if the results of the 2006 survey are not radically different from those of 2005, public opinion in Albania has become more mature. Implicitly, the timing of the survey was a test for all actors dedicated to informing the public on the integration process such as the Ministry of European Integration (MEI), the Delegation of the European Commission in Tirana and even our own Albanian Institute for International Studies which this year embarked on a vigorous three-year programme of events, newsletters, and the freely-distributed *EUROPA* newspaper under the Network for Open Society in Albania (NOSA).

Albanian society has come a long way since AIIS implemented the first *Perceptions and Realities* survey in October 2002. The unrestrained exuberance as well as the grave misunderstandings noted in that survey are behind us as target groups have improved dramatically their knowledge of the EU and the challenges lying ahead. The country's integration process has changed from a one-dimensional elite-driven process to real policies that are debated increasingly in public and which impact all Albanians albeit in differing ways. Nevertheless, a great deal remains to be done. "Europe" remains a

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<sup>1</sup> The ten cities were: Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan, Vlora, Gjirokaster, Korça, Durres, Saranda, Pogradec, Lezha.

<sup>2</sup> The 2006 questionnaire contained two major differences from previous questionnaires. First, in order to better explain the broad reasons for supporting or not supporting Albania's EU membership in a fictional referendum, Questions 12 and 13 were added to the questionnaire. These questions allow us to note whether respondents base their support on issues concerning economic development, free movement, standards of living, business competitiveness, national sovereignty, or national identity. Second, since Albania's integration process has entered a new phase with the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) in June 2005, two questions concerning the SAA were added. Question 23 asks respondents whether Albania has signed the SAA while Question 24 asks them to identify the nature of the SA Agreement. All other amendments to the questionnaire were concerned with choices within existing questions. See ANNEX: QUESTIONNAIRE.

hallowed concept that no politician and few public figures dare to debate rationally and imaginatively. This means that the integration process has yet to gain full local ownership. In other words, politicians continue to draft policies according to the demands of Brussels rather than local requirements. All too often they are also willing to “delegate” the responsibility of governance to Brussels as well which makes the political system less inclusive and less sensitive to local interests. This annual survey, as well as most of what AIIS does on EU integration issues, is designed to demystify the process by stripping it bare, debating its pros and cons, and pro-actively recommending policies that will make Albania’s steps on the European road more self-assured and less costly.

The Albanian debate on European integration is not waged between “pro-European” and “anti-European” or “Eurosceptic” camps. As a matter of fact, Albanians are so pro-European that the debate lacks the vigour displayed in other Eastern European countries. Nevertheless, despite the fact that much of what we do politically is justified by the needs and challenges of integration, the process is still far from being widely understood, debated, and transparent. By having taken for granted Albania’s European destiny, we have ceased to struggle for a European Albania for its own sake. We need look no further than our more advanced West Balkan neighbours, Croatia and Macedonia, to note that no country travels the same path to Europe. The European Union will provide only the framework upon which the institutional balances, economic structures and living standards in our country will rest. But the characteristics of European Albania will depend solely on us.

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2006 *Perceptions and Realities* survey was carried out with five target groups: public administration, local government administration, media, NGOs, business and civil society in ten Albanian cities.<sup>3</sup> This is the fourth annual survey carried out by AIIS on Albanians' knowledge of EU and its institutions as well as their understanding of the country's integration process. The other surveys were carried out in 2002, 2004, and 2005. The 2006 survey shows that **support for Albania's EU membership has increased significantly** since 2005 from a low point of 83.9 percent in 2005 and 84.9 percent in 2004 to 92.5 percent. That is, in 2006 the four year trend of constant decline in membership support has changed. This tendency is present across all categories with the exception of Local public administration which notes a slight decrease from 90.5% in 2005 to 87.9% this year. Only 1.2 percent of respondents would vote against EU membership in a hypothetical referendum. This increase in support can be explained by the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Union (EU) and Albania on June 12, 2006 which restored some confidence and faith on the integration process. After three years during which the public perception was that the integration process was stalled, the relatively optimistic annual progress report of the European Commission at the end of 2005 created an upbeat atmosphere which culminated with the signing of the SAA. However, our survey shows that **while the SAA restored support for the country's EU membership, it did not radically alter perceptions on the challenges and timeframes of the integration process.** Signing the SAA made Albanians confident that the country was moving forward again but it did not alter strongly their perceptions of the European Union or the process of integration.

The majority of those polled **support EU membership primarily for economic reasons**—they either believe that their own living standards will increase or that the economy in general will benefit from membership. Yet, **free movement remains a burning issue** with 37 percent justifying their “pro-membership vote” principally because they expect to move freely throughout the EU. Over time, the issue of free movement has gained urgency as the media challenges the existing bilateral visa regimes more vigorously and prospective new members such as Bulgaria and Romania implement more stringent visa requirements.

Respondents continue to see **the EU as the most important strategic partner for Albania.** Its first place compared to other states or international organizations remains undisputed as in all previous *Perceptions and Realities* surveys. Not only did the EU score the highest overall, but all groups agreed by placing it in first place as Albania's strategic partner. Two other international organizations, the United Nations and NATO, scored second and third respectively. The importance of EU-Albania relations is valued highly by all respondents regardless of how their perceptions of the EU or of Albania's progress towards membership vary.

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<sup>3</sup> The ten cities are: Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan, Vlora, Gjirokaster, Korça, Durrës, Saranda, Pogradec, Lezha.

The importance of the increased support for EU membership and the desire to strengthen relations with the EU even further, is made even clearer when we juxtapose it with Albanians' perceptions of the EU and the benefits of membership. Compared to 2005, Albanians are more predisposed to believe that the EU stimulates the economic development of its neighbours. Moreover, the value their place on the EU as a democratic organization, a source of peace and security in Europe, or as an organization open to membership to all European countries has decreased. Also, perceived membership benefits for Albania have decreased except on the free movement issue. Compared to previous years, Albanians value the country's membership benefits less on areas such as democratization, economic development, living standards and rule of law. **Although Albanians value the EU and EU membership benefits slightly less than before, membership support has risen considerably and the desire to strengthen relations with the EU remains very high.**

These seemingly contradictory trends are explained by the fact that **Albanians see no other option than European Union membership.** While perceived membership benefits and the idolization of the EU as an institution have decreased comparatively, they remain very high in absolute terms. More importantly, not only are there no traces of Euroscepticism<sup>4</sup> in Albanian public opinion, but they see EU membership as a good-in-itself. Although respondents have an increasingly more complex understanding of the EU and Albania's integration process, this has not translated into a rejection of Albania's European road by a specific group. When AIIIS began its annual *Perceptions and Realities* survey in 2002, we assumed that a public that is more well-informed on the challenges of EU integration will not turn to Euroscepticism. This assumption has proven right so far: **as Albanians understand the EU better they remain committed to the European perspective.**

As in 2004 and 2005, the **business community is the leading social group in its ambivalent attitude towards EU integration** with only 80 percent of business people surveyed supporting EU membership, 3.2 percent opposing it and 14.6 percent undecided. This group is also the least aware of the conditions Albania has to fulfill in order to gain membership, the country's level of preparedness, and sizable portions of it incorrectly estimate that Albania will be EU member before becoming NATO member. The only exception to the general rule is the Stabilisation and Association Agreement where it is the public administration rather than the business community which is less aware of the nature of the relationship between Albania and EU after the SAA signature. Despite the fact that the private sector is affected a great deal by integration, it remains by far the least aware of the complexities and challenges of the process.

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<sup>4</sup> There are two types of Euroscepticism: hard and soft. Hard Euroscepticism rejects the EU project outright. It perceives the values of EU and its institutions as running counter to the group's deeply-held values. On the other hand, soft Euroscepticism involves contingent or qualified opposition to EU membership based on specific policies or perceived costs of membership. See Ronald H. Linden and Lisa M. Pohlman, "Now You See It, Now You Don't: Anti-EU Politics in Central and Southeast Europe," *European Integration*, December 2003, Vol. 25 (4), 311-312.



Despite the signing of the SAA, **respondents are not more optimistic about the speed of the integration process.** In fact, there are contradictory trends in this regard. On one hand, more Albanians than ever before think that the process is moving ahead “very slowly”—this was the largest category of respondents with 39 percent while in previous years the largest category believed progress was merely “slow.” Yet, it would not be appropriate to conclude that respondents have ignored the signing of the SAA since the percentage of those that think the process is not moving at all is smaller than in 2004 or 2005. If we consider those that estimate the process to be moving “fast” or “slow” as optimists and those that consider it “very slow” or “not moving at all” as pessimists, the number of optimists is slightly higher than the number of pessimists surveyed. In terms of respondents’ time estimates regarding the timing of Albanian membership, we cannot draw any conclusions on the increased pessimism or optimism of respondents with most of them believing that Albania will integrate either in “10 years” or in “15 years.”

Even those that perceive Albania’s integration in the EU to be progressing quickly do not expect the country to integrate before 10 years. In 2005 almost 80 percent of respondents that thought Albania’s integration process was proceeding “fast” estimated that Albania would gain membership within 10 years. In 2006 the percentage is half of that, or almost 40 percent, while the rest of respondents that perceive the integration process is proceeding “fast” estimate that Albania will need more than 10 years. This is the most pessimistic definition of “fast” that AIIS has encountered since the *Perceptions and Realities* survey was first carried out in 2002. Overall, despite the subjective judgments of respondents on the pace of Albanian progress, respondents are becoming more unified over time in their estimation of the length of the process. Thus, **expectations on the length of the process of integration have become more realistic.**

Although the target groups are aware of the signing of the SAA and believe that the country continues to progress on the European road, they have not become more optimistic on the time it will take Albania to become a member of the EU. This is a sign that Albanian public opinion is becoming more mature when it comes to the timing of EU integration. The European debates on enlargement and “absorption capacity” have been reflected in the local media. Last year’s hard bargaining over Croatia’s and Turkey’s accession negotiations and also regarding Macedonia’s candidate status may have raised concerns amongst respondents that the European integration process is not simply a technical one but increasingly a political one as well. Therefore, the signing of the SAA has not persuaded Albanians that the country will join the EU faster.

Despite a higher level of knowledge and understanding of the integration process, **serious misconceptions continue.** Although the signing of the SAA has increased optimism amongst respondents, 72% of them have a wrong perception on the SAA’s impact for Albania. Therefore, there appears the need to better inform the target groups on the nature of the SAA. It is significant that while overall the level of knowledge and understanding of the EU and the integration process has improved considerably, the significance of the SAA has been widely misinterpreted.

The old trends of a **direct relationship between levels of pessimism and levels of support for EU membership** continue. Moreover, the more optimistic respondents are on the speed of the integration process, the higher they estimate the benefits of EU membership. Only perceptions of the European Union remain independent of levels of pessimism or optimism on the speed of the process. While there are no signs that the EU may be by Albanian public opinion, levels of support for the integration process remain dependent on tangible progress on that road which translates into more confidence and feelings of increased ownership by the target groups.

Interestingly, **Albanians perceive political conditions as much more important than economic ones for EU integration.** Albanian politics, free and fair elections and corruption top the list of factors which are deemed important while economic and technical ones are in the middle and factors such as regional stability or the country's religious composition are at the bottom of the list. All groups agree that tangible progress in the fight against corruption and a more consensual approach to politics that guarantees free and fair elections are the key factors which determine the country's EU integration. On the other hand, the fact that structural factors upon which Albania can have little impact (regional stability) or no impact at all (religious composition) is a positive sign of people's faith in the European perspective. In other words, respondents value as important those factors that can be made to work in favour of Albania and are dependent on local agency or action. The fact that issues such as religious composition or regional stability are not deemed important for EU integration means that respondents see no long-term structural impediments to EU membership.

The primacy of political factors should come as no surprise since it reflects the daily political agenda in Tirana and in Brussels. The constant calls from Brussels to address election problems, corruption, or political consensus have usually found Tirana busy with mutual recriminations, wild accusations of links with the criminal underworld and an inability to consolidate democratic gains. In this environment, it is understandable that public attention has shifted away from the economic and legal aspects of the integration process.

Herein lies the conundrum facing Albania's efforts to integrate in the EU. On one hand, Albanians are united on the idea of Europe and seem determined to keep to the European road. They have conceived of no other goals worth pursuing in the long-term. On the other hand, they seem to be caught in the "political trap" of a perpetual transition to democracy. The inability of the political system to implement even some of its most basic obligations, does not allow the public to focus on what should be the real integration agenda: rule of law, property rights, a professional judiciary and public administration, opening up of markets, infrastructure, economic competitiveness, education and the adoption of the *acquis*. The longer we remain stuck in the political trap, the further away Europe will remain from us.

## II. RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2002 – 2005 tendency of constant decline in support for Albania's EU membership has been finally reversed in 2006. Now there is a larger share of respondents who would firmly support Albania's EU membership than in 2004 or 2005, though yet, well below the 2002 level. This comes certainly as a result of the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Union (EU) and Albania on June 12, 2006. Nevertheless, considering respondents' disillusionment on Albania's rather hesitant progress in the previous years and their increasingly improved knowledge on the European integration process, respondents this year still tend to demonstrate a rather prudent optimism on this process' future prospects. Namely, while the SAA restored support for Albania's EU membership, it did not translate into excessive optimism over the challenges and timeframes of the integration process. Signing the SAA made Albanians confident that the country was moving forward again but it did not alter strongly their perceptions of the European Union or the process of integration.

While one year ago the survey identified the beginning of an interest-driven resistance to EU integration the comparative analysis of the four surveys (2002 – 2006) confirms such a tendency also this year in the case of the business category. Although the signing of the SA Agreement has resulted with a decrease in the number of opponents in this category, the business community still remains the least supportive category for EU membership. Not only may the fear from the Interim Agreement (IA) be one of the reasons for this group's interest-driven resistance to EU integration, but also the lack of comprehensive information regarding the SAA's trade provisions (IA) may have further strengthened the sense of resistance. While this group holds the central government as the most responsible institution to provide EU integration related information, the Ministry of European Integration appears to be the least active provider of information for respondents in this category.

Hence the efforts of the Albanian Government and other actors need to focus particularly on the business community which is the central category that will experience the most the consequences of the new contractual relationship between Albania and EU. To this aim Albanian Government and other actors involved in Albania's EU integration process should:

- Undertake information campaigns on the provisions of the Interim Agreement with business community representatives and associations (Chambers of Commerce) throughout the country, by taking also serious note to the categorization of IA's provisions and also the sub-sectors within the business sector;
- Carry out studies, analyses and reports on the effects of the Interim Agreement's implementation (upon its entry into force) in the national economy and within different economic sectors. These studies should be made public and further discussed with business representatives not only in order to enhance their level of

acquaintance with and information about the Agreement and its consequences, but also in order to prepare them to act accordingly in the subsequent stages of IA's implementation. In this context, an ongoing consultation forum involving the business community representatives and competent governmental bodies will further enhance their communication link and will also facilitate the objective assessment of IA's effects;

- In order to achieve the objectives to which the aforementioned recommendations draw attention, an inclusive approach and enhanced transparency of governmental actors involved in the EU integration process remain crucial for success.

While respondents continue to demonstrate improved knowledge on EU based on information coming from a more diverse range of sources (EU-based factors), the SA Process is still not understood in the country. There is also a general feeling of pessimism (or realism) when it comes to the progress and the timeframes of the integration process. However, differently from the previous surveys when pessimism was mainly a consequence of the growing frustrations and disillusionment from the lack of progress, this year it seems that changes in the number of optimists / pessimists can take place not only due to the internal factors, but also as an effect of other, "Brussels"-based factors, such as the ongoing European debate on future enlargements and EU's absorption capacity. On the other hand, there is also a relatively widespread confusion as regarding Albania's readiness for EU membership the expected benefits from such event, and also lack of awareness as regarding the recent signing of the SAA. Misperceptions regarding the free movement in EU countries are further strengthened by lack of information as regarding two fundamental issues: the significance of the recently signed SAA for Albania's integration process; and to a certain extent, also the Commission's initiative for facilitating the visa regime with Western Balkans, over which there was more political debate and little information regarding the difference with a free visa regime.

Considering the fact all categories "suffer" from such misperceptions and from a general feeling of pessimism regarding the prospects (speed and thoroughness) of the European integration process the Government should:

- Undertake specialized and well-focused information campaigns targeting important stakeholders which will explain not only the perspective of the European integration process in general terms, but also the significance of the SAA and the outcomes from the new contractual relationship with the EU and its member states. While such measures would improve capacities of important target groups, the Government should upgrade the information broadcasted to the general public with its own information campaign targeting the Albanian public at large;
- Establish permanent cooperation and consultations with interest groups and civil think tank institutions in order to facilitate the reciprocal information flow. This will not only increase the non-governmental actors' understanding and awareness on the challenges of the integration process, but it will also

endow governmental actors in charge of such process with a valuable feedback from the former concerning their experiences as conditioned with the achieved progress in the SA Process. Simultaneously, this means a step forward towards a more open and inclusive integration process.

- The Government can enhance its technical capacities by outsourcing technical projects relating to the integration process to civil society think-tanks and the academia. Albania's experience with regional Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and WTO membership demonstrated the need for a better utilization of existing capacities so that such experiences do not get repeated again especially with the Interim Agreement. Also, it can cooperate with other civil society groups in information and awareness campaigns on EU integration issues.
- The Government and the political elite must show determination and diligence to achieve tangible results in implementing the reforms and addressing challenges identified in the European Partnership within the established timeframes, in order to alter the perceived, and in fact slow pace of Albania's EU integration process.

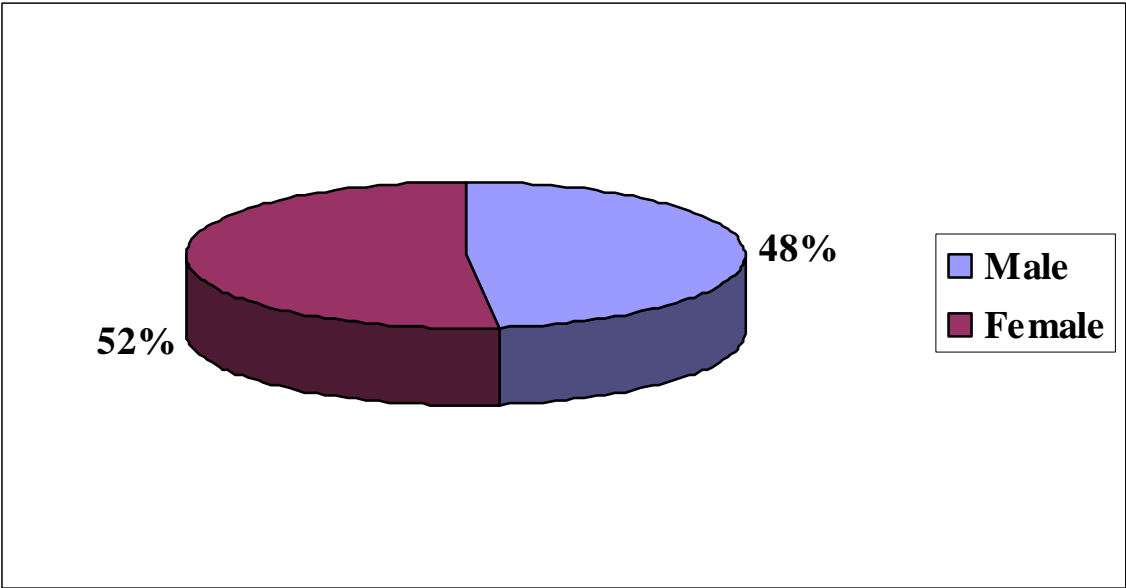
In accordance with the general ambition to de-capitalize the integration process and making it more open and inclusive, civil society and other important stakeholders involved or affected by the European integration process (NGOs, academia, Media, Business etc.) should:

- Improve their understanding and awareness on the EU integration challenges and opportunities, as well as their capacities to enrich the process by both: offering their contribution and pressuring actors in charge to take serious notice of their involvement;
- Further extent the communication link within themselves and between them and the general public, and also facilitate the absorption of the complex integrative processes throughout the Albanian polity.
- Focus on the need to increase local ownership of the integration process. Given the considerable latitude that exists in implementing necessary reforms, a great deal of effort needs to be spent on how to tailor the reforms to local needs. This approach rather than the current top-down approach would enhance the benefits of the reform.

### III. General Sample

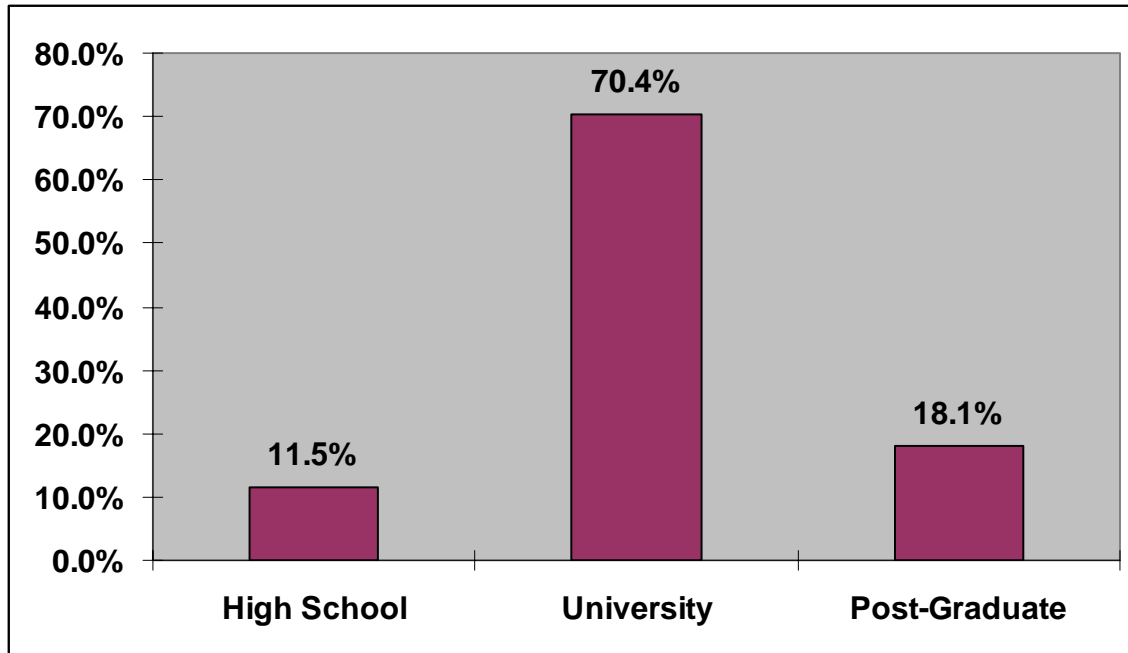
A general equilibrium between males and females is reflected in the general sample, with females slightly better represented than males. (See Figure 1) The gender composition of the sample does not differ much from the gender composition of the population. Females were overrepresented in the media and public administration groups (central and local) by 64.2%, 55.1% and 51.6% respectively while males' presence was dominant in business and NGO categories by 53.0% and 57.8%.

**Figure 1: Gender Representation in General Sample**



In accordance with our goal to include in this survey target groups with education levels mainly over the average one, the vast majority of interviewed persons (namely 88.5%) holds a university degree or a postgraduate diploma. (See Figure 2) The percentage of persons holding at least a university degree was especially high in the groups of public administration and the media.

**Figure 2: Education level in the General Sample**

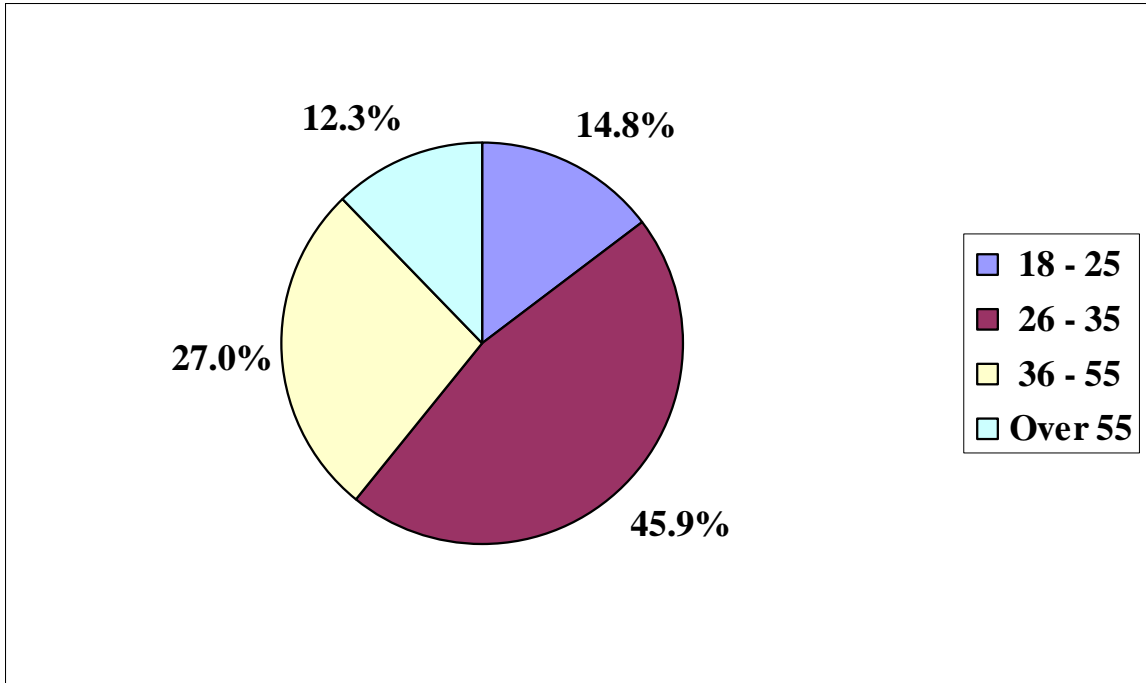


**Table 1: Education level in the surveyed categories**

	<b>Central P.Ad.</b>	<b>Local P. Ad.</b>	<b>Business</b>	<b>NGOs</b>	<b>Media</b>
<b>High School</b>	0.4%	0.0%	32.4%	0.0%	11.3%
<b>University</b>	73.1%	91.2%	55.7%	60.0%	84.9%
<b>PostGraduate</b>	26.4%	8.8%	11.4%	40.0%	3.8%

While the majority of respondents still remains young compared to previous years' survey, falling in the 26-35 age group and the next biggest group is 36-55 years old, the percentage of respondents in the "Over 55" age group, has increased compared to the 2005 survey. The domination of the younger age groups in the general sample could be attributed to the young average age of Albanian population. *See Figure 3.*

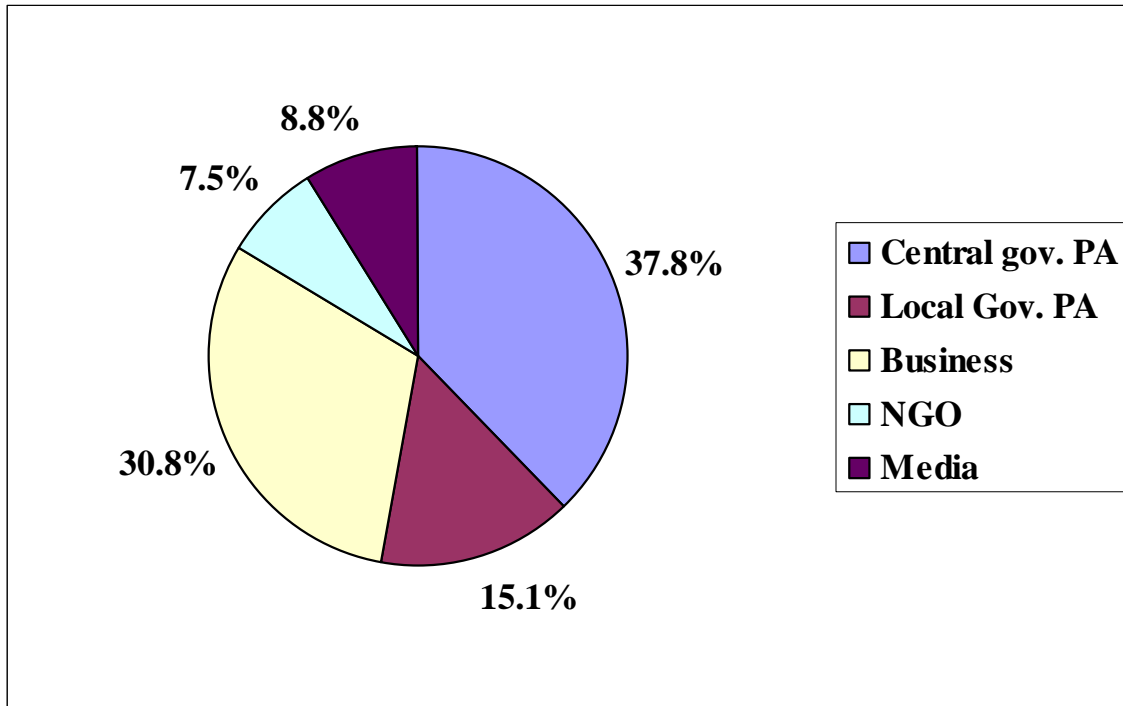
**Figure 3: Age Distribution of Respondents**



Although the central government public administration still holds the greatest share of respondents (37.8%), the number of respondents in another category - business – notes an increase to 30.7% of the general sample compared to previous annual *Perceptions and Realities* surveys. The remaining three categories - media, local government administration and NGOs, comprised 8.8%, 15.1% and 7.5% of the total sample respectively. (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Target Groups Sample Percentages**





**Table 2: Sample Description for Each Category**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Central P.Ad. %</b>	<b>Local P.Ad. %</b>	<b>Businesses %</b>	<b>NGOs %</b>	<b>Media %</b>	<b>Total %</b>
<b>Percentage</b>						
<b>Male</b>	44.9%	48.4%	53.0%	57.8%	35.8%	48.0%
<b>Female</b>	55.1%	55.1%	47.0%	42.2%	64.2%	52.0%
<b>High School Diploma</b>	0.4%	0.0%	32.4%	0.0%	11.3%	11.5%
<b>University Diploma</b>	73.1%	91.2%	55.7%	60.0%	84.9%	70.4%
<b>Post-Graduate Studies</b>	26.4%	8.8%	11.4%	40.0%	3.8%	18.1%
<b>18-25 years old</b>	8.8%	12.1%	14.1%	2.2%	58.5%	14.8%
<b>26-35 years old</b>	40.1%	56.0%	49.2%	66.7%	24.5%	45.9%
<b>36-55 years old</b>	32.6%	19.8%	25.9%	28.9%	17.0%	27.0%
<b>Over 55 years old</b>	18.5%	12.1%	10.8%	2.2%	0.0%	12.3%

As shown in Table 2, the surveyed categories display similar characteristics. Namely, they all have a large majority of respondents that are well educated, i.e. possessing at least a university degree. This is in line with the primary objective of this research, to survey a relatively educated group in every category. Meanwhile in every category most of respondents were young, falling in the “26-35” age group.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

This study is the fourth annual report being prepared by the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) in the framework of its project “European Integration – Perceptions and Realities” since September 2002, when the first survey report was issued. That report was followed by two others in 2004 and 2005. The goal of this study is to assess the level of knowledge and perceptions on EU and Albania’s integration into EU within five target groups with presumably significant *stakes* in EU integration issues: the central and local government public administration, media, local NGOs and businesses. AIIS decided to make use of the same questionnaire<sup>5</sup> as in previous years in a sample composed of the same categories as in 2005; the 2002 and 2004 surveys did not include the category of public administration in the local government. This categorization of the target groups was done in order to explore the dynamic of change on the level of knowledge and perceptions on the integration process among various social strata and in particular among those groups which are crucial for the progress of this process.

It is important to point out that this is the fourth year that this research is carried out since the country entered the Stabilization and Association Process. The first report (2002) was prepared only a few weeks before the official opening of the negotiations for the Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA) on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2003, while the latest study (2006) comes only a couple of months after the official signing of the SAA. During this time EU and Albania’s integrations process has been in the focus of political and social discourse, from political parties to the media. Since the last “Perceptions & Realities” Report (December 2005) there are three major events that have been present in the EU integration debate in the country and thus, portrayed also in the perceptions of respondents identified by the latest annual survey (2006): **a)** the political debate over Turkey’s and Croatia’s accession negotiations and the political bargaining over Macedonia’s candidate status (October – December 2005); **b)** the ongoing European debate on the need for deepening EU institutions and on EU’s enlargement dilemmas – the future of enlargement policy and EU’s “final borders”, Turkey’s membership and the future of Europe, the constitutional debate and finally, the so-called “EU’s absorption capacity”; **c)** and last but not least, the official signing of the SAA between Albania and EU (12 June 2006), as well as the Commission’s initiative to facilitate the visa regime between EU and Western Balkan countries, including Albania.

In order to achieve the project’s goal – to assess the level of knowledge and perceptions on EU and Albania’s integration into EU in five categories, the following objectives were set by the AIIS team:

- Assess the dynamic of change within categories in terms of perceptions, expectations, and information;
- Assess the familiarity of the chosen categories with international organizations in general and EU in particular;

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<sup>5</sup> With a few partial changes, which do not affect the essence of the questionnaire and its comparability. See “Introduction.”

- Assess perceptions and attitudes towards EU;
- Evaluate the familiarity and perceptions of the chosen groups with the process of integration into EU for Albania;
- Identify the main sources of information on EU for the chosen categories.

## Survey Design

The survey is based on the same questionnaire that was used in the previous surveys. However, the questionnaire contains partial changes, which do not affect its essence and comparability. Some questions were added relating to perceptions on relations with neighbors in the context of the recent changes – the dissolution of the Serb-Montenegrin Union, as well as questions relating to the recently signed SAA and its benefits, in order to explore issues that have arisen during these years. With regard to Albania’s EU membership prospects the questionnaire further explores the reasons behind Albanians’ decision to back or reject the European perspective of the country. Another novelty in this year’s questionnaire related to the sources of EU related information represents the level of responsibility in providing such information by the main actors in the European integration process.

The questionnaire was prepared by the survey team of the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS). As in the previous surveys (2002, 2004 and 2005), the questionnaire contains four main sections: *General Information on the Interviewee*, *General Information on EU*, *The Process of EU Integration*, and *Sources of Information*. Final revisions and organizations of the questions resulted in a 10 page, 28 questions and approximately 100 variables questionnaire. In order to achieve accurate as well as unbiased responses, the questionnaire contains both, closed ended and open-ended questions (SEE Annex 1 - Questionnaire). Most of the survey data in this report are presented in percentages while certain results are articulated also in a 1 – 10 scale of assessment.

## Sampling Procedures and Fieldwork

In order to preserve the continuity of the project, as well as the possibility to draw comparisons, this year’s sample corresponded approximately to the 2005 survey sample, which included for the first time also the category of public administration of local government. Furthermore, as it was the case with the last survey (2005), this year’s survey involved respondents from ten major Albanian cities (Tirana included) in all categories, except the category “*central level public administration*”.

The categories surveyed in 2006 are:

- Central Government Public Administration (in Tirana)
- Local Government Public Administration
- Media

- NGOs
- Businesses

The fieldwork for the survey was completed during the month of July 2006. The above categories were chosen for mainly two reasons. First, they provide an audience whose knowledge on EU is above that of the average citizen; this selection allows for more qualified answers. It also allows us more room to explore the level of knowledge and perceptions on EU and EU integration for Albania. Secondly, these categories and especially the Central Government Public Administration are both immediately responsible for and directly affected by Albania's EU integration process. Furthermore, categories such as the Media, but also local NGOs and government agencies, are sources of information on EU and Albania's EU integration process. Therefore, their answers are of greater interest than those of the average citizen even if only for the mere fact that these categories to a large extent shape the knowledge and perceptions of the public at large. Moreover, the previous surveys revealed serious misunderstanding even within these categories, and it was interesting to review the dynamic of change over the time, given the large-scale attention devoted to integration issues both in the political and social discourse. In this context, while the comparison over the years becomes more complicated in 2006 as it refers to three reports (2002, 2004 and 2005 reports), it simultaneously becomes more reliable.

The absence of accurate statistics prevented a rigorous random probability sample throughout the chosen categories. Stratified sampling was used in three categories: Public Administration of both, local and central government and Media, in order to have a representative sample and data that could be analyzed according to each of the specific categories. In the three cases randomization techniques are built into the sampling in order to increase the representativeness of the sample. In the case of businesses and local NGOs purely random probability techniques were employed.

#### *Central Government Public Administration*

The first challenge we had to face when selecting a representative sample for the central public administration was the very definition of the public administration. First, we had to decide on the institutions that were to be listed and on their employees. The institutions we decided upon were all the government departments and agencies, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Parliament, and the Presidency.

Initially, a list of all of the above-mentioned institutions and their civil servant personnel was computed. The data was taken from the Department of Public Administration (DPA). Then a representative sample of respondents was selected with a weighted number of respondents in each institution proportional to its ratio of civil servants in relation to the total number of civil servants.

#### *Local Government Public Administration*

The selection of a representative sample for the local government public administration followed the same methodology as for the central public administration sample. The survey included only respondents from the following ten municipalities (cities, not rural areas) - Municipality of Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Shkoder, Vlore, Fier, Korce, Lezhe,

Lushnje and Kavaje. The survey sample for this category was conditioned not only by the number of civil servants in each municipality, but also by the number of citizens in each of the selected cities (municipalities). This data was taken from the last census of Albanian population (2001) conducted by the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT).

### *Media*

A similar methodology was pursued in sampling the media. The media outlets that were chosen were: TV stations, daily newspapers and radio stations. A list of these outlets was compiled with the number of journalists working in each of them. In the case of media, the respondent category consisted of journalists. Besides the number of journalists working at each media outlet, another consideration was also the audience of each outlet. The larger the audience the more the number of journalists interviewed. Due to the patchy information we had on the size of each outlet audience we did not use this factor as a primary consideration, which should have been the case under ideal conditions.

### *Businesses*

In the case of the Business category the survey team compiled a list of businesses either nationally owned or with mixed ownership (Albanian & foreign ownership) located in Tirana and the other nine major cities. The distinction between those businesses belonging to the services sector and the ones in the production sector was the next categorization criteria within this target group since these sectors are affected in very different ways by the integration process. Out of this list, a representative sample was randomly selected. This choice was dictated by the goal of our survey which is to assess Albanian perceptions only. The list of businesses was compiled using the data available at the Chambers of Commerce. The list of enlisted businesses was not exhaustive, i.e. it did not include the entire gamut of businesses. However, the list was representative of medium and large businesses. Our bias towards medium and large businesses was justified mainly on methodological grounds for two reasons. First, medium and large businesses have larger stakes in Albania's integration towards EU, which might entail greater interest on such a process. Secondly these businesses are easier to define since they avoid informal sector complications and other methodological obstacles in defining small-sized enterprises.

Within this sample, we interviewed only managerial staff or where possible the owner(s) of the business. This choice was in line with our goal to gather informed responses, or at least responses from those who had greater stakes in Albania's EU integration process. Since we did not possess prior data on the size of the business, or the number of employees it was decided that on each case the interviewer would ask for the size of the business or the number of employees and depending on this information perform more than one interview where appropriate. While this choice undermined the scientific accuracy of the sample it did ensure a more weighted sample of the businesses depending on their size.

### *NGO-s*

In the same fashion as with the Business sector in the case of NGOs a list of Albanian NGOs in ten major cities was compiled, out of which the AIIS team selected randomly a representative sample. Here again as in the case of the business category given the

absence of reliable information on the number of employees in each NGO it was decided that the larger the number of employees the greater the number of interviews that were performed. This principle was pursued rigorously in each individual case. Thus, even in this case we worked with a weighted sample. Those interviewed were the employees excluding supporting staff, such as drivers or secretaries. The aim was always to increase the chances of well-informed responses.

## **Limitations and Strengths of the Survey**

First of all, it is important to note that the survey conducted by AIIS is not a public survey in the traditional sense of the word. The results cannot be used to show the perceptions and the level of knowledge of the Albanian public at large. These results are valid only for the chosen categories on individual bases. They do not reflect the perceptions or the level of knowledge of the average citizen, no matter how we define him/her. Moreover, the categories are so different from each other that any analysis that groups their responses together should be very cautious in drawing far reaching conclusions. One should also bear in mind that only four (out of five) of these categories are based in the ten selected cities, while the category - central public administration is based in Tirana. Thus, the first limitation of the survey pertains to the selection of the categories.

Having said this, it is also important to mention that the data, both on an individual and group basis does reflect the perceptions and the level of knowledge of a population group that is, or should be, better informed than the average citizen. However, even in this case the data should be used very cautiously since some important categories that belong to this group such as politicians, university students or members of the academia have not been included.

Another limitation of the survey relates to the sampling methodology and its implementation. Sampling was conducted in the absence of accurate information. In categories such as local NGOs or locally owned businesses we did not possess information on the number of the employees or the size of the business. In the case of the Media our information on the audience of the media outlet was not systematic and often limited to only a restricted number of major TV stations or major newspapers.

Besides the above-mentioned limitations, the survey also has some major strengths. The questionnaire that was used, after consecutive rounds of testing, was designed to be simple, easy to use as well as informative. Thus, the interviews were designed to be short and conversational, which meant that in most cases the responses were candid and spontaneous. This was also made possible by the rating scale that we used, which was from 1 to 10, a scale that replicates the Albanian grading system so all respondents were familiar with it from their school years. During the interview phase, none of the respondents had difficulties in understanding the rating scale.

Qualitative questions were combined with quantitative ones in a complementary fashion. The respondents were asked for their opinion on a specific issue, for example the speed of EU integration for Albania, and then asked to quantify that opinion, in terms of years in the present example. This makes the interpretation of the data more accurate as qualitative answers can be now quantified.

The two categories that were most rigorously surveyed were the central and local public administration and media. In these cases, the sample was very representative and carefully selected. In the three categories the respondents were quite collaborative; this on the other hand made the implementation of the survey easier. In all cases the sample size was large enough to allow statistical analyses for the given category.

## V. SURVEY FINDINGS

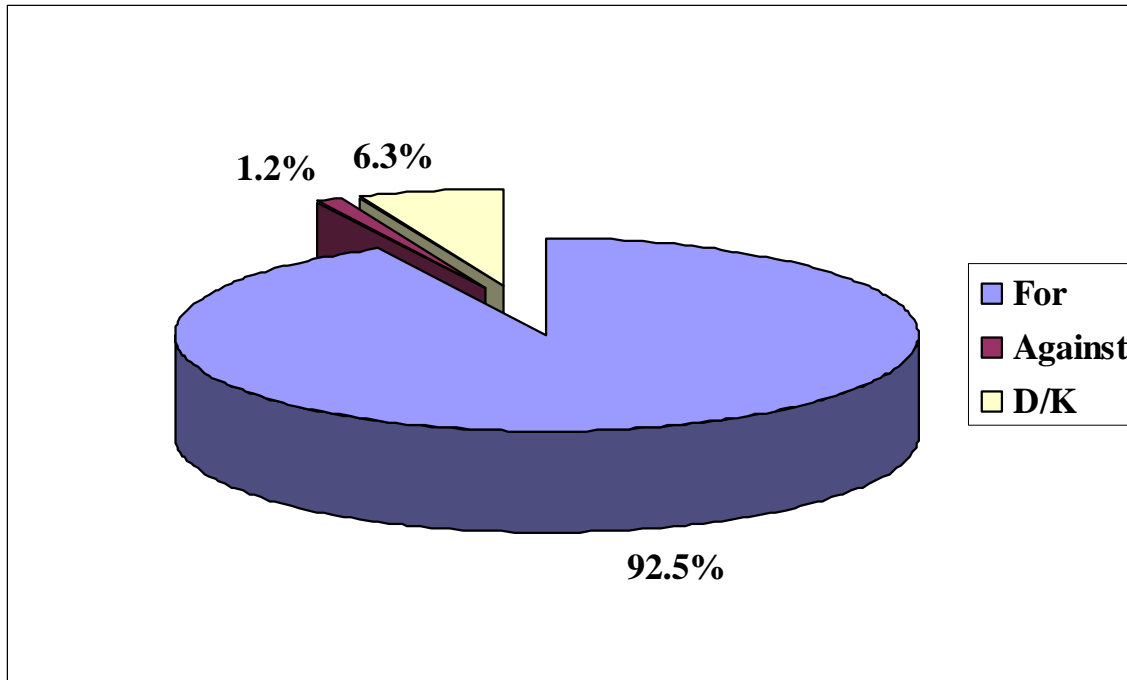
### o Support for EU Accession

Support for Albania's accession in EU has been recovered in 2006, as compared to the relatively "pessimistic" 2005 results (83.9%) and also with regard to 2004 (89%). However, respondents are not as positive as 4 years ago – in 2002 support for EU accession amounted 99% - although their support remains quite impressive. Namely, 92.5% of respondents this year say they would vote in favor of the country's EU accession if a referendum was held tomorrow while only a negligible percentage, scarcely 1.2%, are against. Albania's recent progress in the stabilization and association process – the signing of the SA Agreement, has undoubtedly raised respondents' expectations following three-years during which the European integration process had largely stalled. Nevertheless, this year's reversal of that tendency can not be fully explained with this event (SAA signing). About 7.5% of respondents would not vote in favour of EU membership regardless of the recently announced "*best news in the last three years*". That is largely because respondents have improved their knowledge of the European integration process and its costs even when compared to 2005. This group of respondents is not sure about what will Albania's EU bid bring to the ordinary citizen, which means that the integration process is not seen by them as a simple solution to Albanians' concerns. Nevertheless, if this data is compared with the previous AIIIS studies, one may still not conclude that this group (in %) notes a steady growth over the years. The share of respondents who are undecided in 2006 amounts 6.3 percent which is still within the frames of the last three years' percentages (5.5% in 2004 and 8.5% last year). See *Figure 1*.

*Question: Suppose there was tomorrow a referendum in order to decide whether Albania should join European Union (EU) or not, how would you vote. Would you vote for or against Albania's membership in EU??*

**Figure 1: Level of Support for Albania's EU Membership 2006 – General Sample**

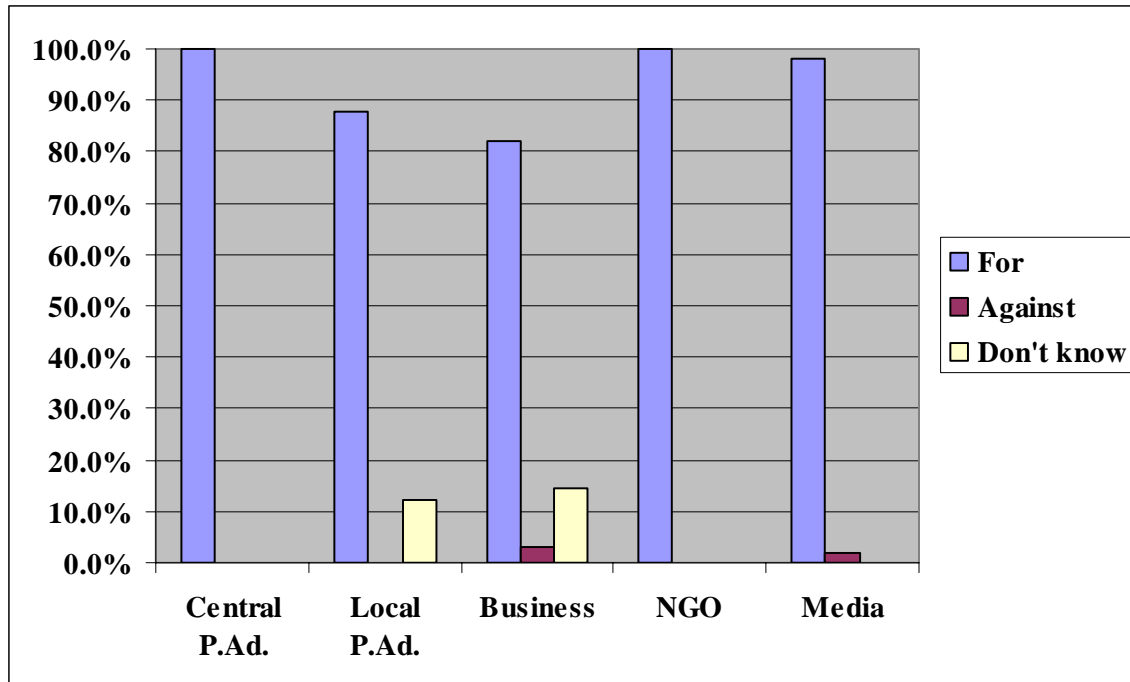




The *good news* for this year is the fact that there is a sharp decline in the number of respondents who firmly oppose Albania’s EU accession, most of them from the business community. The aforementioned trend of increased support for EU membership as compared to the previous studies is also present throughout the surveyed categories individually, except the local public administration which contrary to a year ago, in 2006 demonstrates less support (87.9%) - with 12.1% undecided and “luckily” with no opponents of EU membership. Surprisingly, central public administration and NGOs give 100% support for Albania’s EU membership, differently from one year ago when they were at 89.8% and 72.4% levels respectively. The share of 1.9% of respondents in the media category who would oppose EU membership is “eclipsed” by the overwhelming 98.1% who would definitely vote in favor of accession.

The business community constitutes the most “less EU-optimistic” category also in 2006 – 82.2% in favor - although there is a remarkable increase of approximately 14 percentage points as compared to 2005 data (68.3%). Furthermore, 17.8% of respondents in this category either don’t know how they would vote (14.6%) or they would definitely vote against (3.2%). *See Figure 2.*

**Figure 2: Level of Support for Albania’s EU Membership 2006 – Categories**



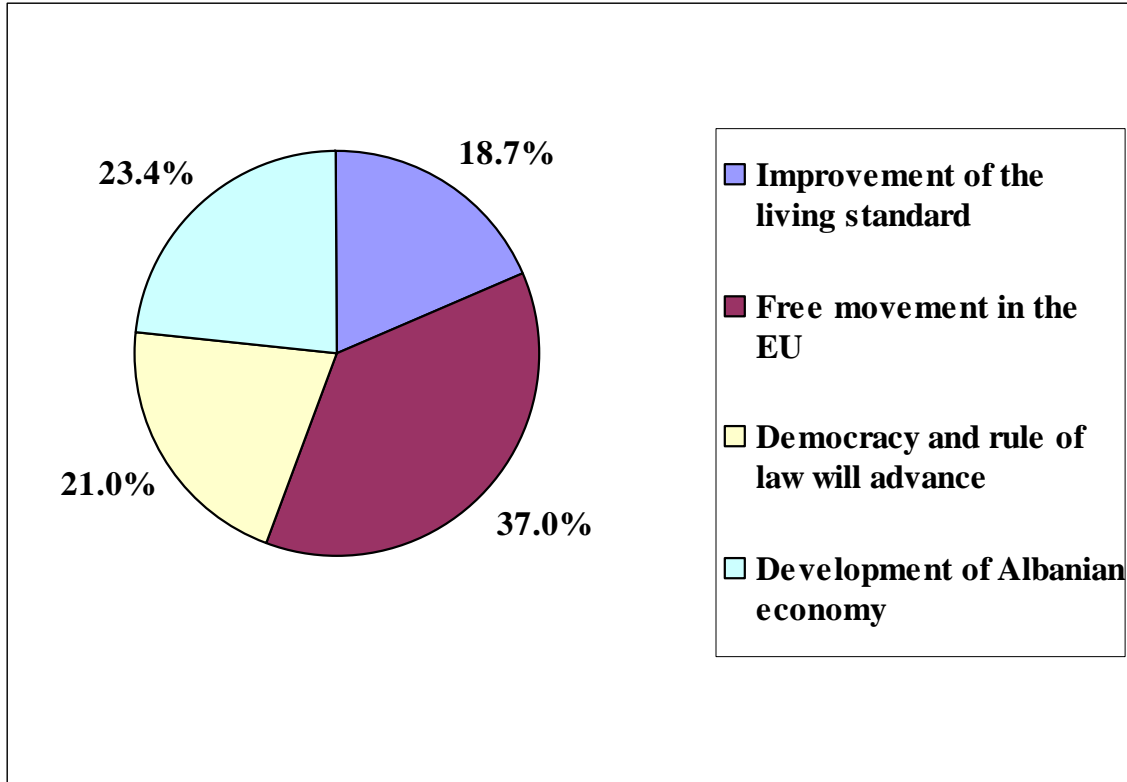
The business category constitutes at this point the most “reliable” target group if we analyze its changing attitude from 2002 – 2006, but simultaneously, without referring to the most pessimistic year – the 2005, which resulted with a distorted picture of support for EU accession, mainly due to the disappointment from the three years long SAA negotiations.<sup>6</sup> Namely, the data reveal that this category is slowly but steadily “offering” less support for Albania’s EU accession, falling from 96.9% in 2002, to 86.7% in 2004 and finally to 82.2% this year. Such tendency is not present in other categories which is understandable bearing in mind that the business community is by far under a greater pressure than these categories.

The reasons behind the respondents’ decision to support or not Albania’s EU membership are for the first time explored in this year’s survey.<sup>7</sup> Namely, the supporters of membership are asked about the main reason behind their choice and as the data suggests free movement in the European Union takes the first place with almost 37%, which is round 5 percentage points less than the “economic” reasons – improvement of living standard and development of Albanian economy - taken together (approximately 42%). See Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Main reasons for supporting Albania’s EU membership 2006 – General Sample**

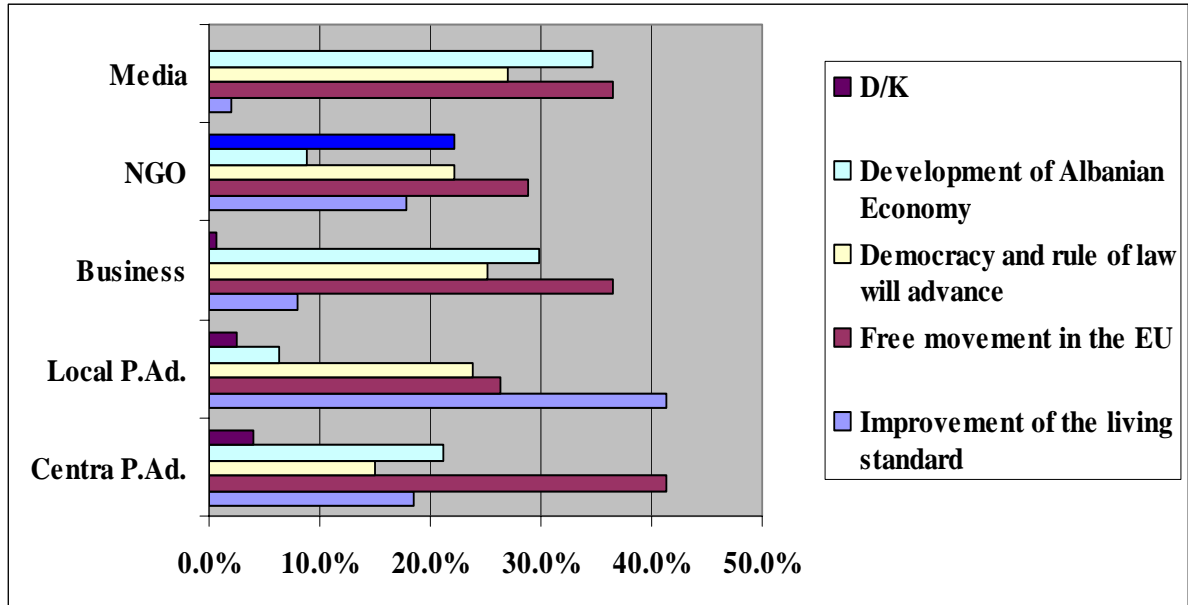
<sup>6</sup> Apart from the long SAA negotiations, another source of *frustration* for the business community in 2005 were also the very reasons that conditioned the drawn-out negotiations, i.e. lack of reforms in many areas with an impact on the economic sphere (corruption, bribes, judiciary, organized crime etc.).

<sup>7</sup> Due to the small percentage of respondents opposing EU membership – only 1.2% - it is not statistically acceptable to offer and comment on the distribution of this group’s answers as regarding the reason why would they vote against membership.



The previous AIIS surveys have persistently warned that free movement in EU countries is perceived by Albanians as one of the main benefits to be derived from eventual EU membership. Furthermore, the 2006 data reveal that this factor constitutes the main reason that motivates most of respondents who are positive about Albania's accession in the Union. This trend is also present across the surveyed categories except the local government administration which is more concerned with living standards. In addition, while expectations about the further development of Albanian economy come at the second place in three categories – Media, Business, and Central public administration – the remaining two communities being surveyed reveal other incentives. *See Figure 4.*

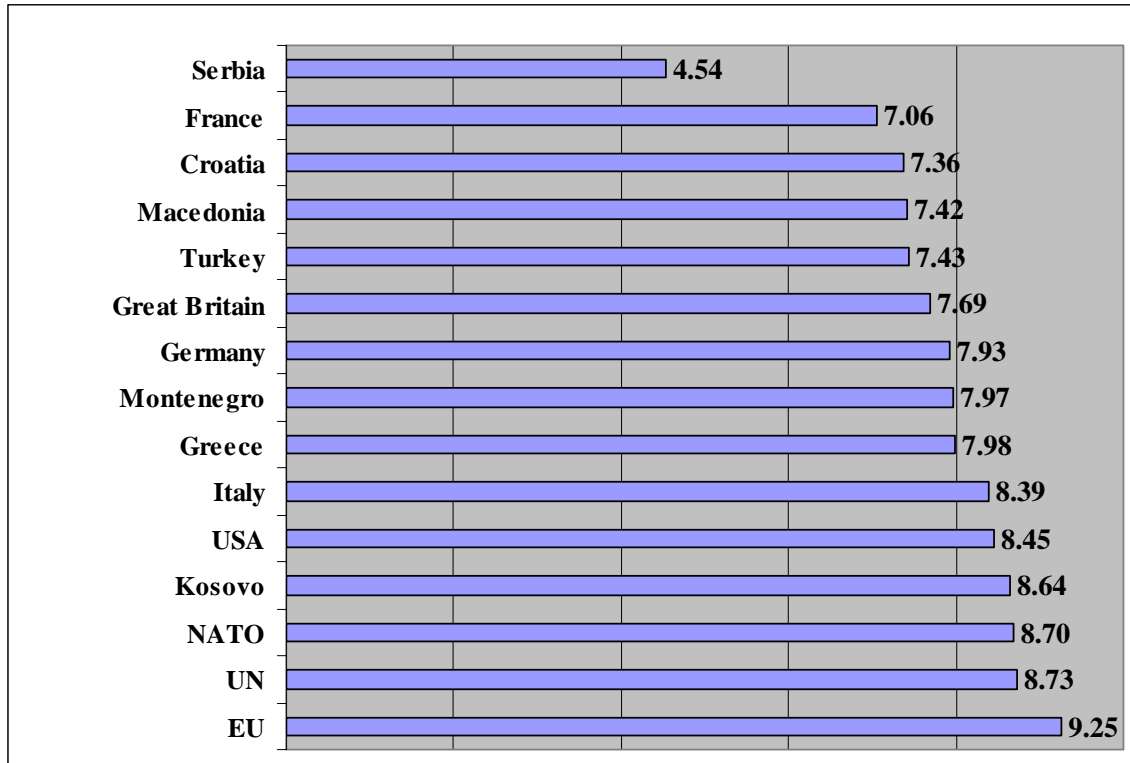
**Figure 4: Main reasons for supporting Albania's EU membership 2006 – Categories**



More than Albanians' need to visit EU countries the aforementioned data demonstrates their frustration with the long list of unfair conditions the ordinary citizen has to fulfill in order to obtain a visa. However, such frustrations do not affect the respondents' attitude towards EU and neither the importance they attach to the relations between Albania and EU. See Figure 5.

*Question: In your opinion how much importance should the Government place in strengthening Albania's relations with the following states/organizations? Please evaluate in a scale from 1 to 10, bearing in mind that the higher the number the more importance should, in your opinion, the Albanian government pay to strengthening ties with the given State/Organization.*

**Figure 5: Albania's International Partners –General Sample 2006**



As portrayed in the figure above, when respondents were asked to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 10 the importance that the Government should pay to strengthening Albania's relations with some 15 states/organizations, EU scored the highest (9.25 out of 10). Although EU's score notes a slight decrease of almost 0.3 points as compared to the last year's rating (9.57), its (first) place remains undisputed as in the previous three surveys (2002 – 2005). Not only did EU score the highest, it also had one of the lowest standard deviation which means that the answers on EU vary very little, i.e. respondents generally agree on the importance that Government should pay to strengthening Albania's relations with EU. *See Table 1.*

**Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation for the General Sample – 2005**

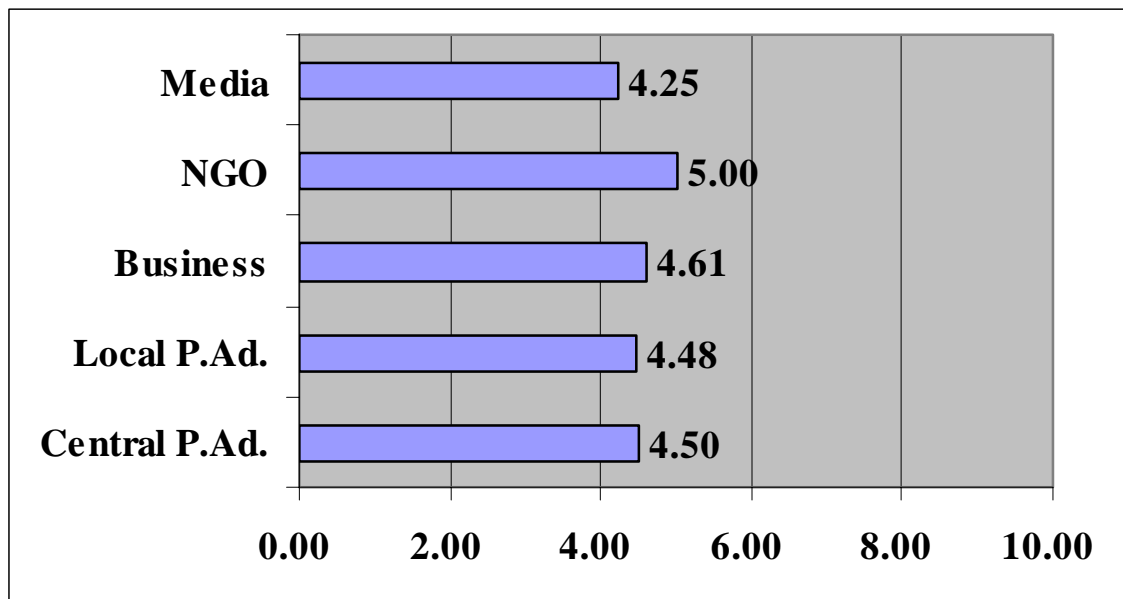
	EU	Kosovo	NATO	UN	USA	Italy	G. Brit.	Turkey	Germany	Greece	Croatia	France	Macedonia	Serbia	Montenegro
<b>Mean</b>	9.25	8.64	8.70	8.73	8.45	8.39	7.69	7.43	7.93	7.98	7.36	7.06	7.42	4.54	7.97
<b>Std. Dev.</b>	1.64	2	1.81	1.62	2.64	2.01	1.99	2.19	1.91	2.07	2.64	2.33	2.13	2.36	2.05

The 2006 data point out to two additional facts which seem to be closely related. Following the Montenegrin independence referendum (May 2006) respondents are now offering a clear assessment of the importance Albanian government should pay to the relations with Serbia. This country scores the lowest - 4.54, which notes the lowest score ever of the AIIS "Perceptions & Realities" reports since 2002. The dispute between Kosovo and Serbia and the opposing positions between Belgrade and Tirana as regarding

the final status of Kosovo may have well influenced respondents' rating for Serbia, which is now more than three points away from its former Union partner – Montenegro (7.97). On the other hand, the forthcoming decision on Kosovo's final status may partly "explain" the second and the third place for UN and NATO respectively, since these organizations together with EU and USA may be perceived as key factors in this process. Nevertheless, while the Kosovo status may influence respondents' rating, it surely can not be the main factor as these organizations have been highly rated also in the previous surveys (since 2002).

The importance of relations with Serbia has gained the lowest score also within each category individually, with NGOs awarding these relations a higher score comparatively - highest score as compared to other categories (5), though still the lowest one within the NGO category. *See Figure 6.*

**Figure 6: Importance of relations with Serbia – Categories 2006**



According to the table below (Table 2), EU scores the highest in three categories – Media (9.98), NGOs (10, sharing the same place with Italy) and local public administration (sharing the 10 score with UN and USA). The business category puts EU as the second most important international partner while for the central administration EU is the third most important partner. *See Table 2.*

**Table 2: Albania's international partners – Categories 2006**

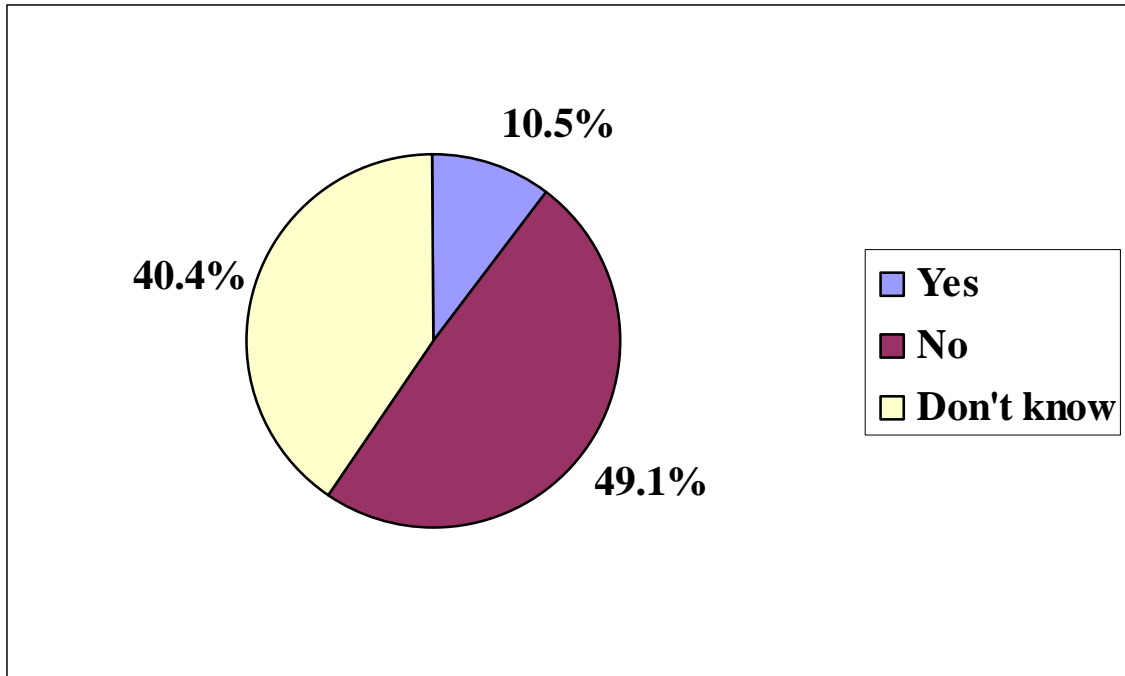
	Central P. Ad.	Local P. Ad.	Business	NGO	Media
<b>EU</b>	8.62	10.00	9.28	10.00	9.98
<b>NATO</b>	8.09	9.93	8.68	8.80	9.13
<b>UN</b>	8.66	10.00	8.55	8.29	7.85

<b>Italy</b>	8.17	7.85	8.33	10.00	9.06
<b>Greece</b>	8.20	8.59	7.55	8.20	7.32
<b>Germany</b>	7.95	8.42	7.78	7.56	7.79
<b>France</b>	7.58	6.27	6.64	7.71	7.13
<b>USA</b>	7.92	10.00	8.19	8.33	9.08
<b>Great Britain</b>	8.17	8.63	7.14	6.60	6.89
<b>Turkey</b>	7.30	7.12	7.35	9.33	7.25
<b>Macedonia</b>	7.18	8.26	7.18	8.13	7.21
<b>Serbia</b>	4.50	4.48	4.61	5.00	4.25
<b>Croatia</b>	8.87	7.24	5.79	8.73	5.47
<b>Montenegro</b>	7.66	9.51	7.58	9.27	6.89
<b>Kosovo</b>	8.01	9.69	9.36	7.44	8.06

If this data is analyzed in correlation with respondents' increased support for Albania's EU accession in 2006 (as compared to 2005 and also to 2004 survey) the conclusion of the previous reports holds true also this year. Namely, Albanians' predisposition for supporting EU membership should not necessarily be linked with their assessment as regarding the importance of Albania-EU relations. Even in the case of the less supportive category for EU accession - the business community - the difference between the most important partner (Kosovo) and EU (at the second place) amounts barely 0.08 points. What's more important – regardless of respondents' changing attitude over the years for supporting Albania's European integration, EU since 2002 and onwards still remains the most important international partner. In view of that, respondents have started to make a distinction between the “undisputed importance of Albania-EU relations” and the costs & benefits deriving from Albania's eventual EU membership.

Nevertheless, such distinction does not necessarily mean that respondents are clear on whether Albania is ready to become a member of EU. Unlike the previous survey (2005) when almost 2/3 of respondents were sure that Albania was not ready, this year almost 49% of them declare so. The official signing of the SAA in June 2006 has caused confusion amongst those 40% of respondents who don't know whether Albania is ready or not for full membership in the Union (only 13% in 2005). *See Figure 7.*

**Figure 7: Is Albania ready for full EU membership? – General Sample 2006**

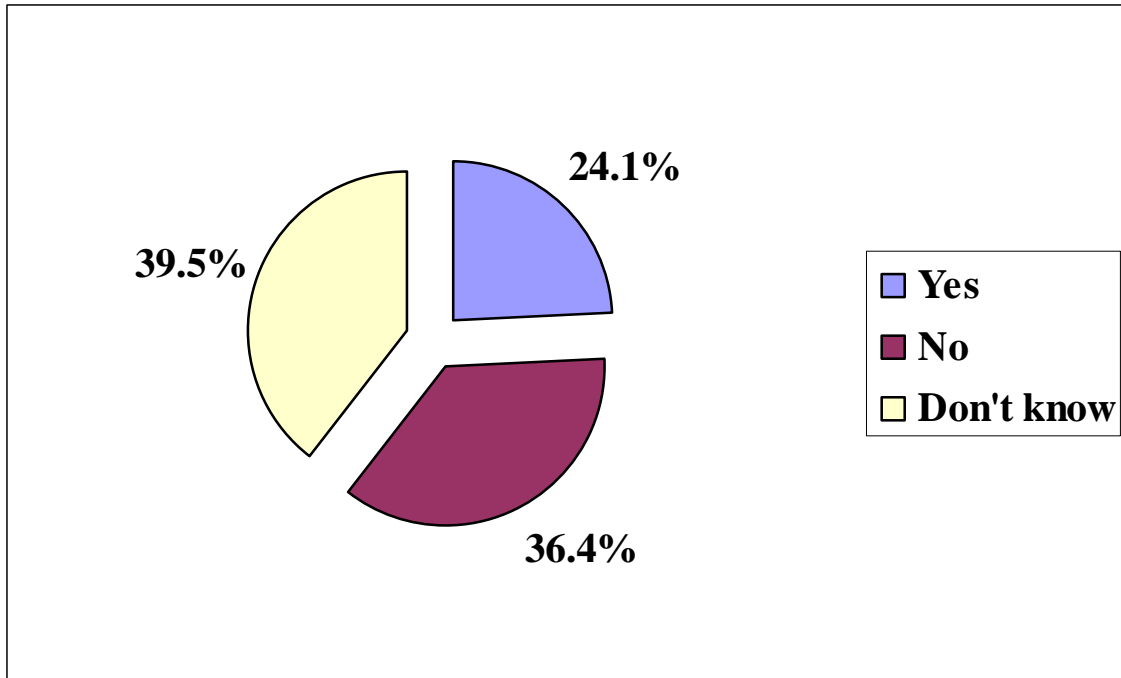


While the number of respondents who know for sure we are not ready for membership has decreased, compared to last year, so has also the share of respondents who think Albania is ready for membership – from 20% in 2005 to 10.5% this year. The *confusion* regarding this question remains at almost the same levels also in the subsequent one when respondents are asked whether EU should admit Albania as a full member even if it is not ready. See Figure 8.

*Question. Do you think European Union (EU) should admit Albania into EU even before Albania is prepared to become a member of EU?*

**Figure 8: Should EU admit Albania before it is prepared? –General Sample 2006**

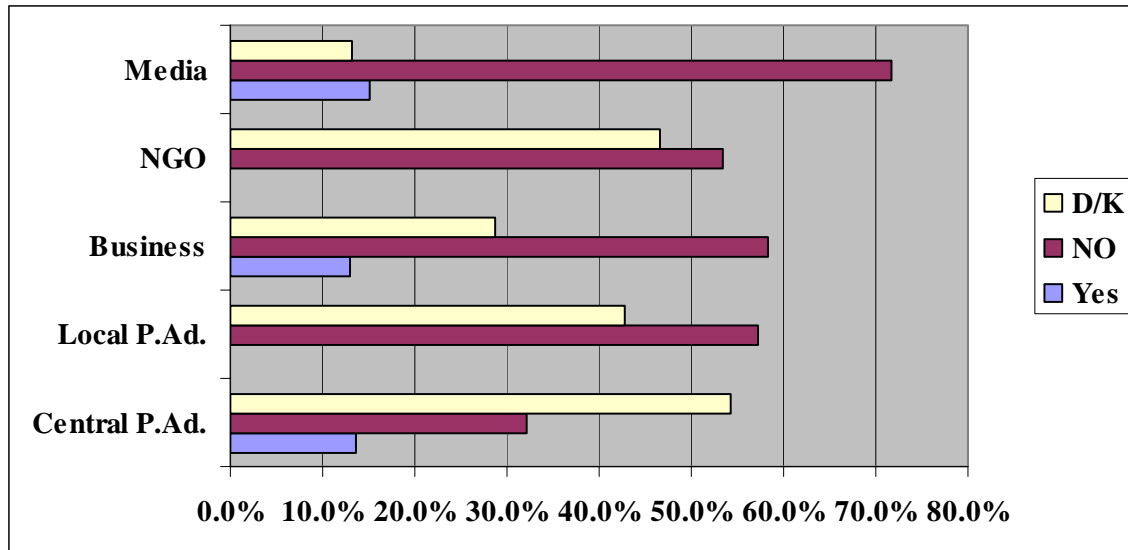




As shown in the figure above, the majority of respondents (39.5%) do not have an appropriate answer to this question while 24.1% of them are positive, which is almost 20 percentage points less than in 2005. The last two figures underline the positive tendency of an increased objectivity of surveyed people because this year we have smaller shares of “YES answers”: Q.14 – Yes Albania is ready for membership; and Q.15 – Yes, EU should admit Albania even if not ready. However, the large percentages of “DON’T KNOW answers” at this point do not leave much space for optimism.

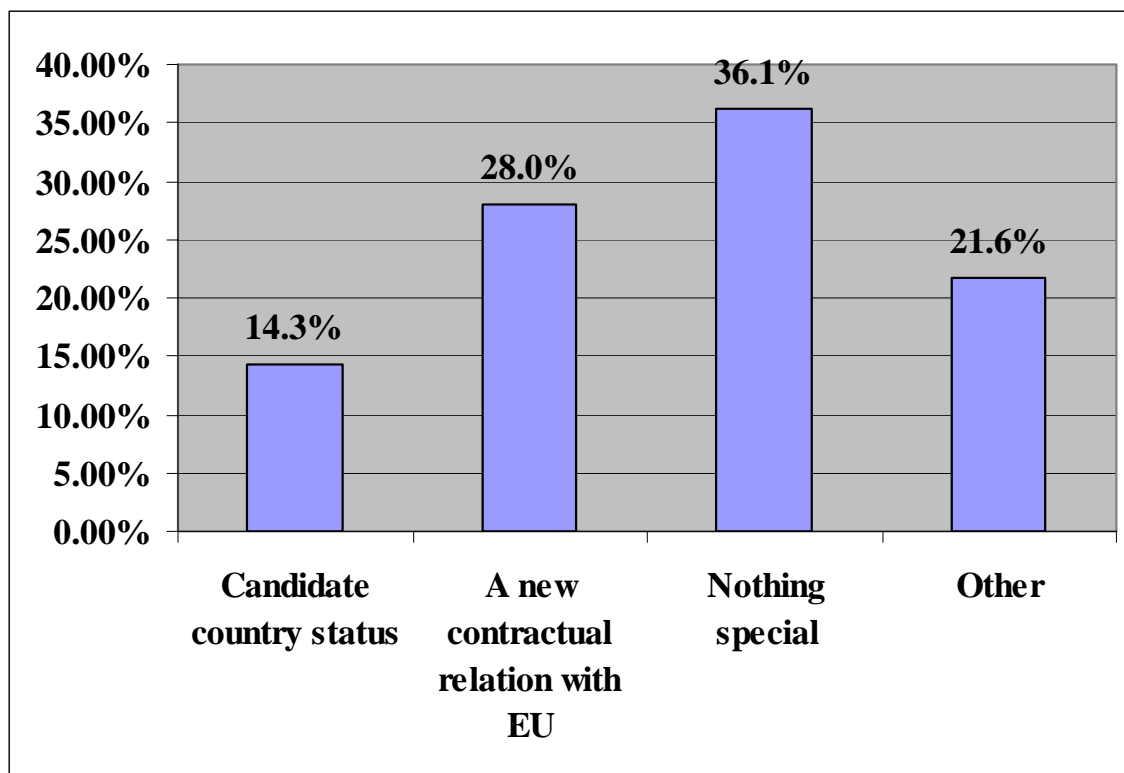
Probably the most “striking” data in this sense can be found in the case of central public administration when asked whether Albania is ready for membership. While all other categories agree on the “NO” answer, the majority of respondents (54.2%) from the central administration don’t know. *See Figure 9.*

**Figure 9: Is Albania ready for full EU membership? – Categories 2006**



Compared to the 2005 survey report when around 70% of respondents from this target group stated that Albania is not ready for EU membership the figure above is perturbing, especially knowing that this category is actually directly involved in the European integration process and as such, the level of its acquaintance with this topic must be more than acceptable. Furthermore, this category of respondents continues to “surprise” us when asked about the *significance* of the recently signed Stabilization and Association Agreement. Namely, almost 99% of respondents are aware of the SAA signing in June, but most of them (36.1%) say it won’t bring anything new for Albania, while 14.3% believe this means “candidate status” for Albania. Only 28% of respondents rightly say that the SAA provides Albania with a new contractual relation with EU; and 21.6% have something else in mind when asked about the SAA’s significance. See Figure 10.

**Figure 9: What does the signing of SAA mean for Albania – General Sample 2006**



Although one may have high expectations as regarding correct answers from the central public administration, in this case, most aware categories are NGOs, media and the business community. *See Table 3.*

**Table 3: What does the signing of SAA mean for Albania – Categories 2006**

<b>Category</b> <b>Statement</b>	<i>Central Public Administration.</i>	<i>Local Public Administration</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>NGO</i>	<i>Media</i>
<i>Candidate country status</i>	11.9%	8.8%	16.2%	37.8%	7.5%
<i>New contractual relation with EU</i>	6.6%	25.3%	41.6%	57.8%	50.9%
<i>Nothing special</i>	54.6%	27.5%	23.8%	4.4%	41.5%
<i>Other</i>	26.9%	38.5%	18.4%	0.0%	0.0%

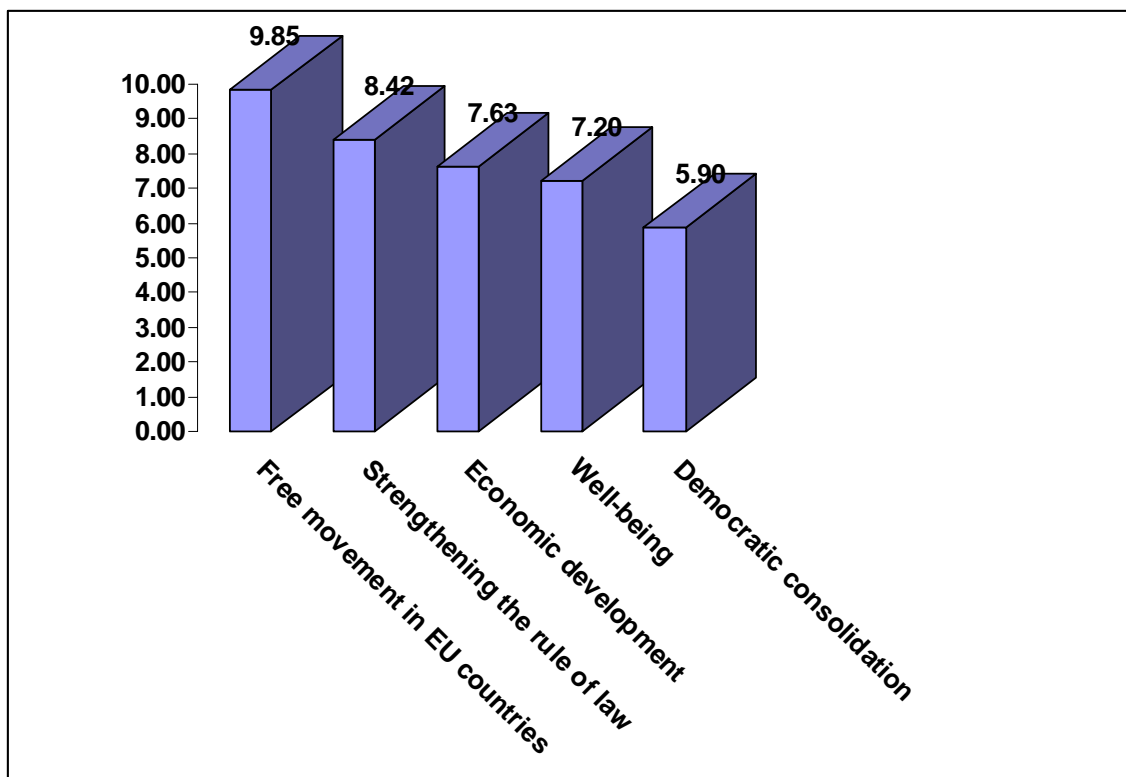
- **Expectations**

The above section analyzed the level of support regarding Albania's EU membership in five chosen categories of Media, Central and Local Government Public Administration, NGOs and Businesses. In order to understand this support we also have to assess perceptions and expectations regarding Albania's EU membership. Of particular importance here are the respondents' expectations regarding benefits from Albania's EU membership.

Expectations explain in great part the still considerable support for Albania's EU membership (92.2%). It is interesting to mention that this year respondents offer not only the highest score ever, but also the lowest one - now the rating of benefits varies from 5.9 (lowest ever) to 9.85 points (highest ever). As it was the case in the previous AIIIS reports (2002 – 2005), the major benefit that respondents expect Albania to derive from EU membership is the free movement of people to EU countries. This option scored the highest at 9.85 out of 10, which is the highest score ever attached to any of the expected benefits in the AIIIS reports. The next most important expected benefit was strengthening the rule of law – 8.42, while the last year's third most important benefit – democratic consolidation – in 2006 takes the last place scoring only 5.9 out of ten. The so-called socio-economic benefits, i.e. economic development and well-being come at third and fourth place with 7.63 and 7.2 respectively. It is important to note that all the expected benefits except the free movement have scored well below last year's least scored one (2005 – Wellbeing got 8.6). *See Figure 11.*

*Question. People have different opinions on the benefits that Albania will derive from EU membership. In your opinion how much will Albania benefit in the following areas? Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the higher the number the more you think Albania will benefit in the given area.*

**Figure 11: Benefits from EU Membership for Albania –General Sample 2006**



If we analyze the standard deviation of respondents' assessment for each benefit they expect from Albania's EU membership it is obvious that respondents agree the most on the free movement in EU countries – the lowest value of approximately 0.6. The least scored benefit – democratic consolidation (5.9) displays quite a high standard deviation, which means that respondents' assessments vary more than that was the case with the remaining four options. *See Table 4.*

**Table 4: Expected benefits - Mean and standard deviation for the general sample 2006**

	Mean	Standard deviation
<b>Democratic consolidation</b>	5.9	3.03
<b>Economic development</b>	7.63	2.35
<b>Well being</b>	7.2	2.52
<b>Strengthening the rule of law</b>	8.42	2.04
<b>Free movement in EU countries</b>	9.85	0.62

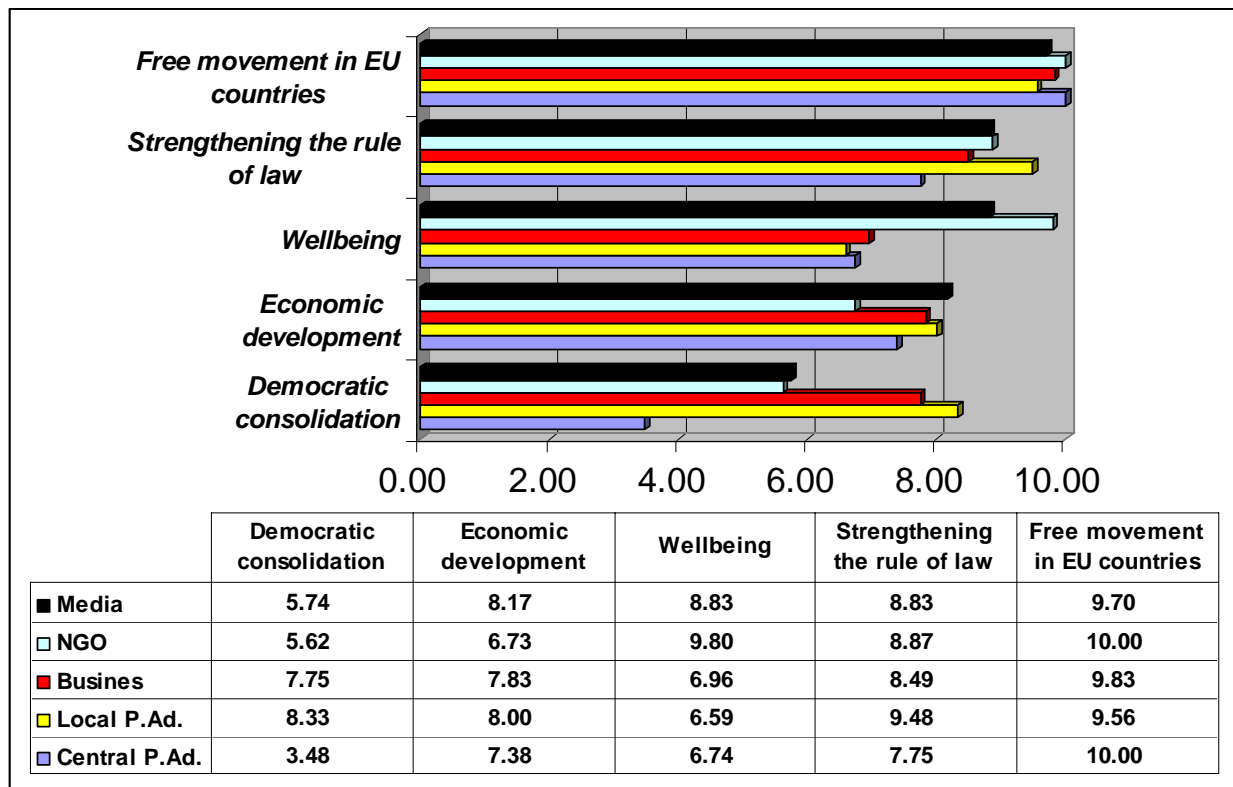
It seems that respondents this year have started to “better appreciate” also the socio-economic benefits, although strengthening the rule of law still remains central right after

the most appreciated benefit - free movement. Although the signing of the SAA may have elevated enthusiasm amongst respondents as regarding the economic benefits (*vis a vis* democratic consolidation), the lower scores for all options in the questionnaire as compared to the last year, except for free movement, show that Albanians now demonstrate a prudent optimism which may come as a consequence of both: improved knowledge on the process or due to the disillusionment from Albania's vague process in the previous years. While the daily political agenda continues to articulate the need for addressing economic issues and rule of law related problems, it seems that respondents' "prudent optimism is immune" when it comes to free movement in EU countries.

The socio-economic benefits are better scored than the democratic consolidation by all categories of respondents except the local public administration which preserves the last year's rating (socio-economic benefits in the last place) and the business community – wellbeing, the least scored option (6.96). However, businessmen have a better "understanding" towards economic development – scoring 7.83 in this category versus 7.75 for the democratic consolidation. Free movement in EU countries remains the most important benefit for all categories. Respondents from each target group also agree on the second place for the impact that Albania's EU accession would have on the rule of law functioning.

Of the five categories, central administration one has the lowest scores. At the same time, the standard deviation in this group proves to be the highest which means that answers varied in this category more than in the other ones. See Figure 12 and Table 5.

**Figure 12: Benefits from EU Membership for Albania –Categories 2006**



**Table 5: Standard deviation according to categories 2006**

	<b>Central P.Ad.</b>	<b>Local P.Ad.</b>	<b>Business</b>	<b>NGO</b>	<b>Media</b>
<i>Democratic consolidation</i>	2.25	1.64	2.36	2.12	2.35
<i>Economic development</i>	2.77	1.95	2.08	2.00	1.38
<i>Well-being</i>	2.50	2.10	2.36	0.50	1.87
<i>Strengthening the rule of law</i>	2.36	0.85	1.91	1.63	1.60
<i>Free movement</i>	0.00	0.99	0.51	0.00	0.70

As shown in the figure above, all categories still have high expectation from EU membership in 2006, though not as high as in the previous years. Namely, all categories offer lower scores - total mean percentage points - for the aforementioned benefits as compared to 2005 and, with the exception of the business category, also as compared to the 2002 and the 2004 data.<sup>8</sup>

Differently from one year ago, in 2006 a *dependency link* between support for Albania's EU membership and expectations from such an event can be barely noticed within individual categories. In fact, while the central administration has quite low expectations (lowest scores for EU membership benefits) compared to the other categories, it displays a hundred percent support for EU membership. The only case that may confirm such a "dependency link" is the business community - lowest level of EU membership support and also low expectations/scores as regarding benefits from EU accession. However, due to the small differences with the other categories as regarding the overall rating of membership benefits such conclusion would obviously be artificial.

This year respondents have been faced with two divergent occurrences: the enthusiasm of the "best news in the last three years" – signing of the SAA; and the "confusing" legacy of the three years long failures to get to this deal with the European Union. Accordingly, respondents' perceptions in 2006 seem to have been shaped under the "pressure" of both aforementioned occurrences, resulting thus with some kind of prudent optimism, which certainly does not always correspond to the reality. This common sense of prudent optimism on the other hand, in 2006 does not leave much space for groundless pessimism either, because now respondents take into consideration more factors / indicators while articulating their assessments and decisions.

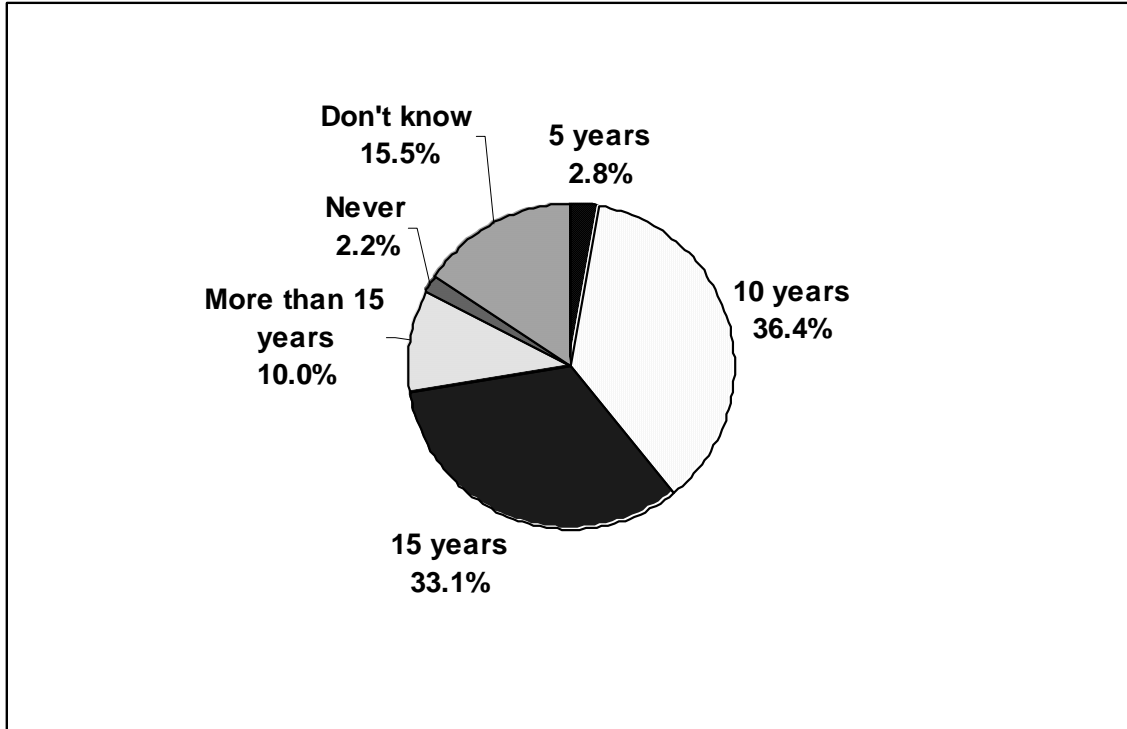
This fact becomes particularly obvious when the surveyed people are asked about the number of years it will take to Albania in order to become a full member of EU. Namely, while one year ago a consolidated majority of respondents (53.4%) thought it will take 10 years, this year this option still takes the first place but by a far smaller percentage - 36.4%. *See Figure 13.*

*Question. There exist different opinions regarding the number of years that it will take Albania to become a member of European Union. In your opinion how long will it take*

<sup>8</sup> The business community has higher expectations this year than in 2002 and in 2004.

for Albania to join EU? Will it take 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, or do you think that Albania will never become a member of EU?

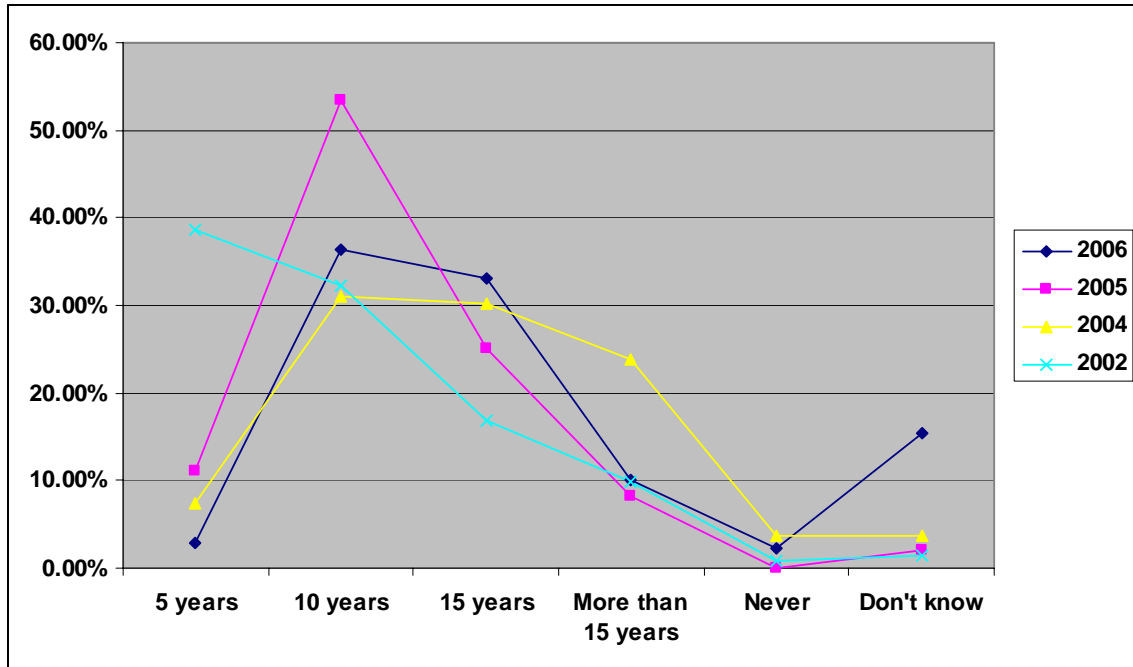
**Figure 13: Number of years for Albania to join EU – General sample 2006**



While the SAA signing has raised expectations amongst many respondents, it seems that there is still a large “community” that takes into account also other factors – the ongoing debate on EU’s absorption capacity, Brussels’ careful declarations as regarding further enlargement, EC reports on Albania’s progress etc. Namely, this year all options remain open, including the “Never” option which one year ago had no supporters. Increasingly less respondents think that it will take 5 years to this event, culminating this year with only 2.8% of respondents sharing this opinion. Differently from 2005 and 2002 this year respondents confirm the 2004 predominance of people who think that it will take 15 years or more (43.09%) over those who think that it will happen in 5 to 10 years time (39.27%), though by far smaller difference in 2006 (3.8%) than it was the case in 2004 (15.5%). Furthermore, this year there is also a considerable number of respondents who do not give a firm answer to this question – 15.5%, more than in any of the previous “Perceptions & Realities” reports. *See Figure 14.*

**Figure 14: Number of years for Albania to join EU: General sample 2002 – 2004 – 2005 - 2006**

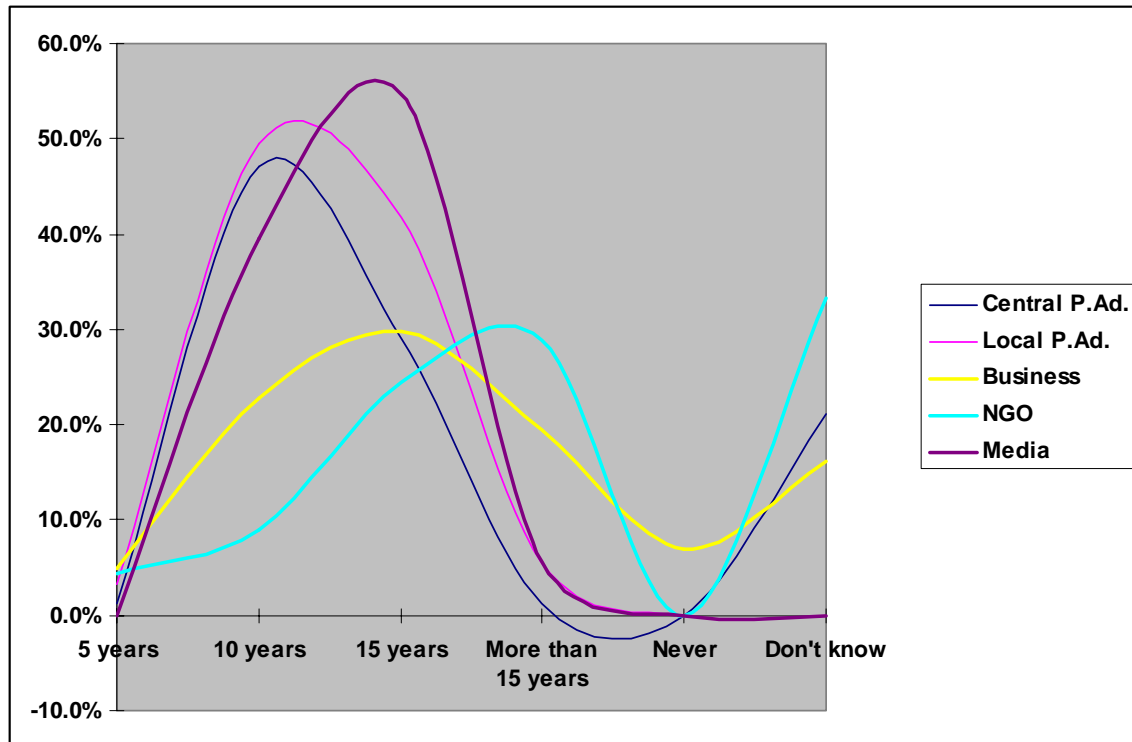




The graph above offers quite a clear picture of the changes over the years as regarding respondents' assessment of the time needed for Albania to join EU. As shown, the only "statement" that brings closer the graph's curbs, regardless of the different transitory moods each year, is the "Never" option which has never had more than 3.75% support. The same goes also for the "5 years" option, but this time only from 2004 onwards. While this year more respondents assume that it will take 15 years (approximately 3% more than in 2004) the curb's coordinates for the remaining options are positioned somewhere in the middle of the previous years' medium value – except the "Don't know" choice. This means that in 2006 respondents have started to shape a relatively objective attitude towards Albania's EU integration which, although is influenced by the aforementioned transitory events (such as the signing of the SAA), now has also started to take into consideration also other factors. The real challenge in this context will be the preservation of such attitude which certainly comes together with an improved level of acquaintance and understanding of the process.

Nevertheless, such "maturity" of the general sample is not a consequence of an approximately equal intensity of percentages for each option across categories, which confirms the different attitudes and level of expectations between the target groups. The small share of respondents within each category confirm that the only options they all together doubt the most are that Albania will join EU in 5 years time (from 0% of Media, up to 4.9% in the business category) and that Albania will never become an EU member – 0% in all categories except business (7%). See Figure 15.

**Figure 15: Number of years for Albania to join EU – Categories 2006**



The most optimistic categories according to the figure above are the local and central public administration as the majority of these groups' respondents believe that within 10 years Albania will join the Union – 47.1% of central administration respondents and 49.5% in local administration. There is also a considerable share within the media respondents who also back this estimation by a greater majority (39.6%) than the business community and NGOs. Accordingly, the last year's most optimistic categories – local and central administration – are on the list also in 2006. In the case of media category - the next most optimistic category in 2005 - this conclusion is valid only if its share of respondents supporting the 10 years estimation is compared to the business and NGO sectors' one, but not within the category. This is so because the majority of respondents (54.7%) in the media category believe it will take 15 years for Albania to join EU. The same opinion share also the majority of the business category (29.7%). Other categories have also quite a large percentage (seen within each category) of those who back this option – NGO 24.4%; local administration 41.8%; central administration 29.1% - but none of them constitutes the majority within their target group. In this context, the majority of the NGO category 28.9% believes that the timeframe for entering EU goes beyond 15 years, while there is an even greater share of respondents in this group who don't have a particular opinion - 33.3% don't know.

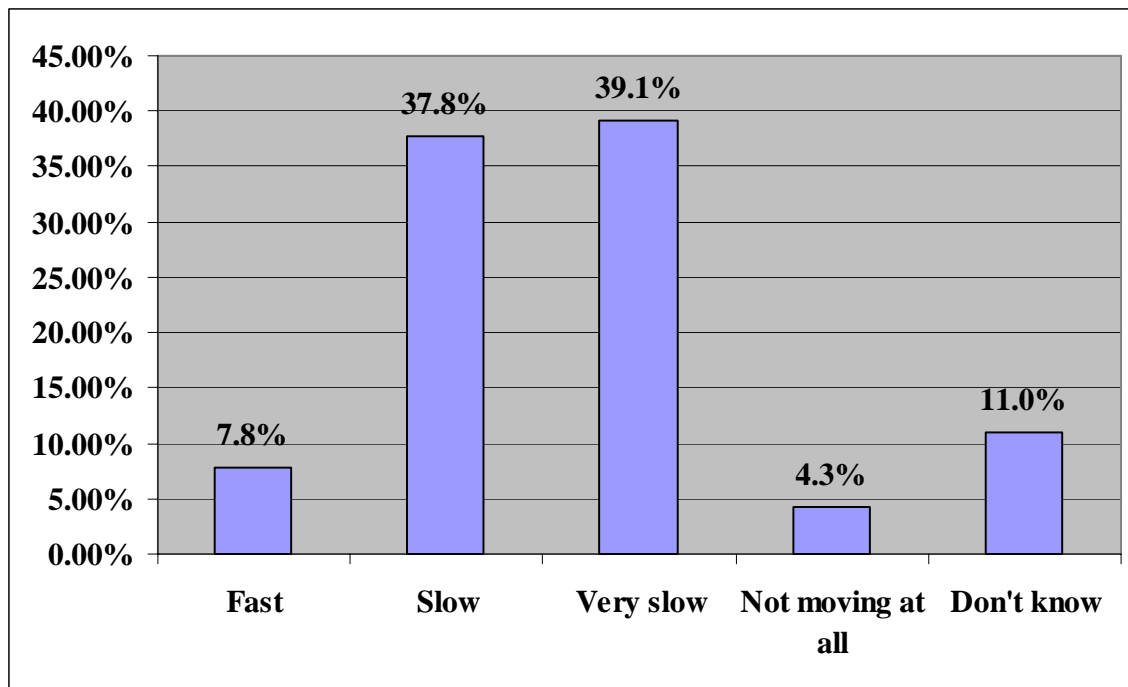
The most pessimistic categories where most of respondents designate a 15 or more than 15 years timeframe for Albania's EU accession are the business category, NGOs and Media with a majority of 49.2%, 53.3% and 60.4% respectively. In the case of local and central public administration, most of respondents designate a 5 to 10 years period (52.7% and 48.5% respectively). Nevertheless, the absolute majority of over 50% is present only in Media, NGO and local administration, although the figures are well below the last year's data – varying from 52% to 76% in different categories.

It is interesting to note that while all categories still maintain the same position (optimism/pessimism) as in 2005, the media category has left the last year's list of optimistic categories, getting back so to its 2004 pessimism.

The fact that generally there is a relatively optimistic view on the number of years that Albania needs to join EU period (36.4% of respondents assigning the 10 years period), does not necessarily mean that the speed of the European integration process in the country is perceived as an extremely fast one. Considering the increase in the number of respondents who designate a 15 years period from 25.1% in 2005 to 33.1% today, changes in the evaluation of the process' speed should not be a surprise. See Figure 16.

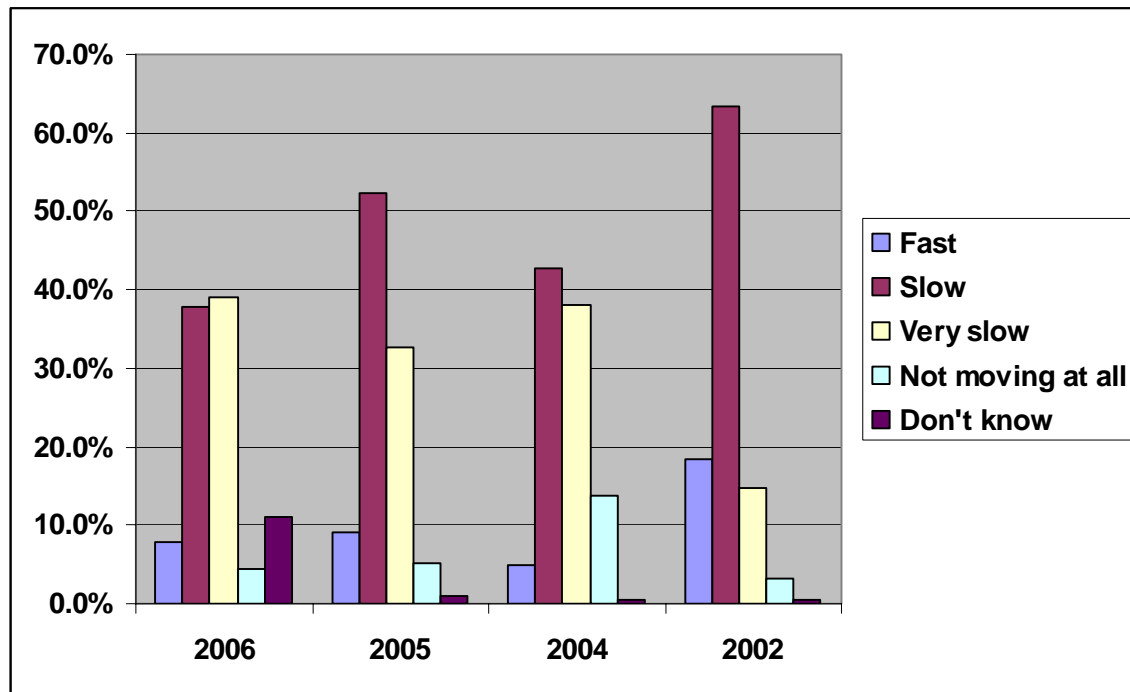
*Question. Different people have different opinions regarding the speed of the process of Albanian integration into EU. In your opinion how is this process taking place? Fast, slow, very slow, not moving at all?*

**Figure 16: The Speed of the Integration Process – General Sample 2006**



Although the signing of the SAA notes a major step forward in Albania's European integration process, the majority of Albanians (39.1%) think the process is moving very slow. This group of respondents is by only 1.3 percentage points larger than the next biggest one – respondents who characterize the process as a slow one (37.8%). Such data constitute a complete overturn in the assessment of the speed of the integration process is present in 2006 as compared to any of the previous AIIS surveys (2002, 2004 and 2005). Namely, the majority of respondents since 2002 onwards have characterised the European integration process as a slow one: 63.3% in 2002, 42.8% in 2004 and 52.2% last year, with a considerable number of respondents characterising it as a very slow one in the last two years - 38% in 2004 and 32.6% of respondents in 2005. See Figure 17.

**Figure 17: The Speed of the Integration Process: General Sample 2002 – 2004 – 2005 - 2006**



Nevertheless, the difference between “Slow” and “Very slow” answers is the smallest one ever achieved in the “Perceptions & Realities” surveys in the last four years – only 1.3%. Furthermore, while 11% of respondents do not have an answer, the percentage of those declaring that the process is not moving at all is smaller than in 2004 or 2005 and practically quite close to the 2002 level (3.1%). Accordingly, it would not be appropriate to conclude that respondents have completely ignored Albania’s biggest achievement in 2006 – the signing of the SA Agreement – thus growing skeptic about the process. This fact is confirmed by the following. Namely, 45.6% of respondents state that the process is moving fast or slow, which is 6.5% more than the “Very slow” group of respondents and also 2.2% more than the number of respondents of the “Very slow” and “Not moving at all” groups together (43.4%).<sup>9</sup> Such a relatively optimistic tendency as regarding the speed of the integration process has been present also in the previous surveys except the pessimistic 2004 survey when there was a greater number of respondents stating the process is moving very slow or not moving at all (51.8%), than the number of those believing the process was moving slow or fast (47.8%). It is, however, evident that both camps – pessimists and optimists – are quite close as regarding the number of their “members” and the difference between them (2.2%) can be easily wiped out by those 11% of respondents who don’t have an opinion on the matter.

It seems that now the changes in the number of optimists or pessimists can take place not only due to the internal factors, but also as an effect of other, Brussels-based factors. Albanian media has often articulated earlier this year the ongoing European debate on future enlargements and EU’s absorption capacity. The last year’s “bargaining” over

<sup>9</sup> However, the number of respondents of this group (45.6%) in 2006 is smaller than of those in any of the previous years: 81.7% in 2002, 47.8% in 2004 and 61.2% in 2005.

Croatia's and Turkey's accession negotiations and also as regarding Macedonia's candidate status may have raised "concerns" amongst respondents that the European integration process is not simply a technical one and that EU members' political decision is also *de rigueur*. In this context, while the signing of the SAA should normally "persuade" more respondents about a decreasing number of years for Albania to join EU, this year there has been achieved the highest number of respondents since 2002 declaring that it will take 15 years (see above).<sup>10</sup> Consequently, respondents' "improved" understanding as regarding the timeframe needed till EU membership may have been one of the reasons why most of them believe the process is going very slow. However, due to the visible results achieved earlier this year (the SAA) and the perceived progress enabling the signing of the SAA give rise to a relatively optimistic tendency as regarding the speed of the integration process – most of respondents characterize it as a fast or slow one (45.6%), which is more than those who see it as a very slow one or as "not moving at all" (43.4%).

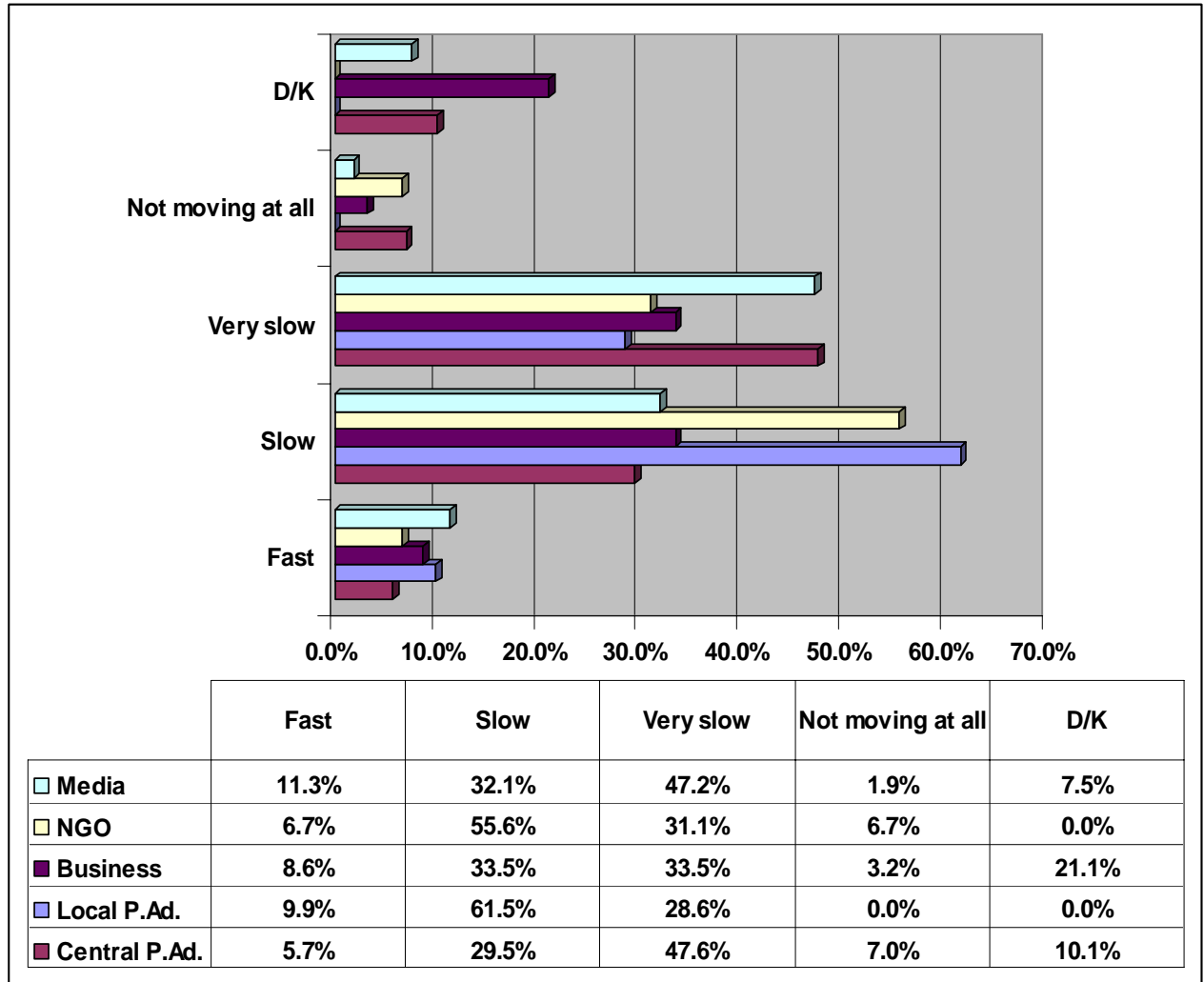
If we consider the respondents' opinions on the speed of the process across all surveyed categories, it becomes clear that the most pessimistic group is actually the only category of respondents directly involved and responsible for the pace of the European integration process – the central public administration. Namely, it notes not only the highest percentage of respondents characterizing the process as a very slow one (47.6%), but also the highest percentage of those who think the process is either moving slow or not moving at all – 54.6% for both options. This data is quite paradoxical when compared to the majority of 47.1% in the central administration holding that it will take 10 years for Albania to become an EU member. The next most pessimistic category is the media community, noting 47.2% of respondents choosing the "very slow" option, which is still more than the share of respondents believing the process is moving slow (32.1%) and those believing that it is moving "fast" (11.3%) even if both data are considered together – 43.4%. at this point, respondents from this category only confirm the previous results: 54.7% of respondents in this category believe that it will take 15 years until EU membership.<sup>11</sup> See Figure 18.

### **Figure 18: The Speed of the Integration Process – Categories 2006**

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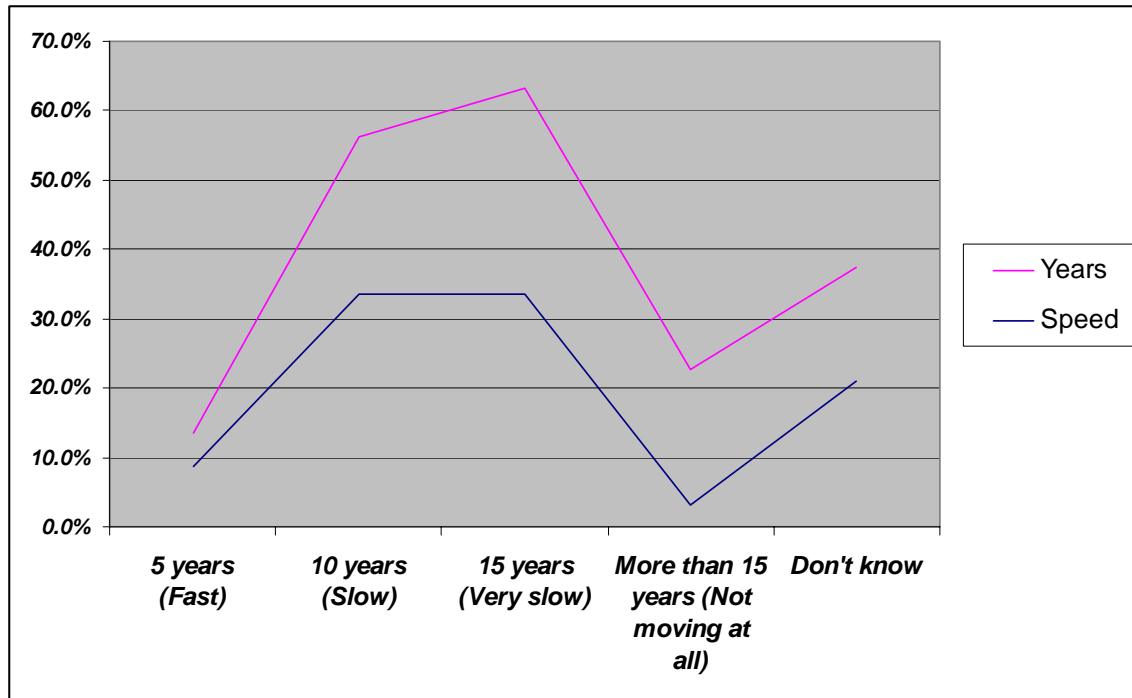
<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, in 2006 there are more respondents designating a 15 or more than 15 years period for Albania to join EU than those who believe that it will happen in 5 to 10 years. This tendency was present also in 2004 but one should bear in mind that two years ago Albanians were disillusioned—there was a general coming down after extremely high initial expectations. Albanians' better understanding as regarding the external factors conditioning EU membership (see below – *Determining factors of integration*) may have shaped a more realistic attitude and expectations from the signing of the SAA. Nevertheless, it is evident that the impact of the SAA signing is more present in the assessment of the pace of Albania's integration process, than in respondents' answers on the number of years until EU membership (where other, external factors are additionally considered).

<sup>11</sup> Still, this category does not seem to be disappointed since around 98% of the surveyed people in this group would vote for Albania's EU membership.



As shown in the figure above, the remaining three categories – NGO, Business and local public administration – can be considered as relatively optimistic ones, presuming that the criteria implies *a higher percentage of respondents of “fast” and “slow” answers as compared to the “very slow” and “not moving at all” ones*. It is interesting to note that respondents of the less EU-membership supportive category – business, displays an equal percentage of respondents characterizing the process as “slow” and “very slow” (33.5%). Furthermore, there is a relatively great number of respondents in this category who actually don’t know how the European integration process is moving in Albania (21.1%). The perceptions on the speed of the process for this category of respondents show a relatively similar tendency as those regarding to the number of years Albania needs until EU membership. See Figure 19.

**Figure 19. Speed of the process vs. the number of years – Business category 2006**



NGOs and local public administration have a majority of well beyond 50% of respondents who believe the process is moving slow. Although the local public administration is the second less supportive category for EU membership, its perceptions on the speed of the process and the number of years till EU membership are rather optimistic. NGOs, one of the most supportive categories for Albania's EU membership, on the other hand seem to be quite "confused" on these matters: the majority of respondents in this category believe the process is moving slow (55.6%), although some 53% are sure it will take 15 or more than 15 years until EU membership.

Apart from the business community where the respondents' *low esteem* as regarding the speed of the process and the number of years until EU accession is "in accordance" with the decreasing support for Albania's EU membership, this has not been the case with other categories. However, such a link is not necessarily an indicator of either firm pessimism or optimism because the respondents' evaluation of the pace of the process is not always linked to their decision for supporting or not Albania's EU membership.

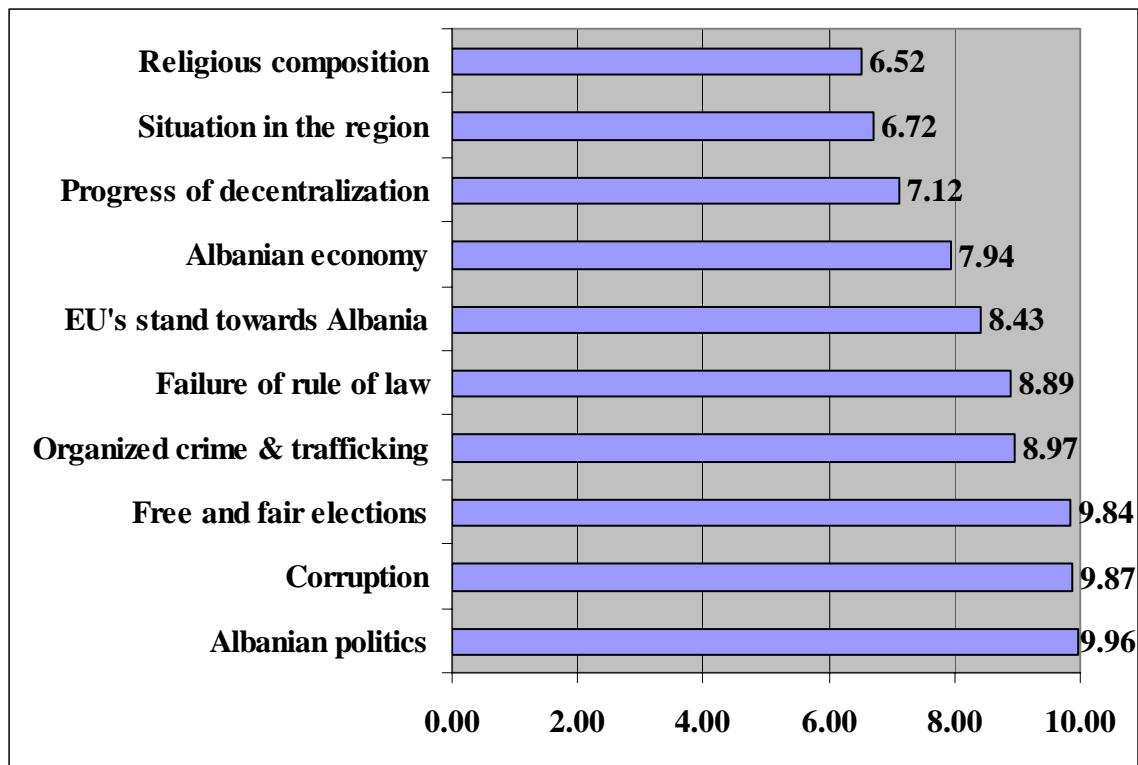
The so far analysis demonstrates that the surveyed categories in 2006 seem to have a rather realistic attitude on the pace of the European integration process and the timeframe for its eventual results (membership) as compared to the previous "Perceptions & Realities" reports. Occasionally, such attitude resembles to a rather prudent optimism which may come as a consequence of both: improved knowledge on the process and / or due to the disillusionment from Albania's vague process in the previous years. Accordingly, the set of factors influencing the respondents' attitude towards the European integration process is now quite wide-ranging.

- **Understanding determining factors of integration**

Respondents' evaluation about the factors determining Albania's European integration process notes several changes as compared to the previous reports. Namely, while Albanian Politics remains the most important factor, this year with the highest score ever – 9.96, Corruption now takes the second place (9.87) shifting thus free and fair elections from the last year's second position to the third place (9.84), surprisingly both scoring higher than the maximum score ever provided by respondents (for any of the factors) since 2002. The least scored factors in 2005 – Religious composition, Situation in the region and the Progress of decentralization – are still considered least important in 2006, scoring 6.52, 6.72 and 7.12 respectively. *See Figure 20.*

*Question. Albania's Membership into EU depends on a variety of factors. In your opinion how important are the factors below. Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the higher the number the more important you consider the factor.*

**Figure 20: Factors Important for Albania's EU Membership – 2005 General Sample**



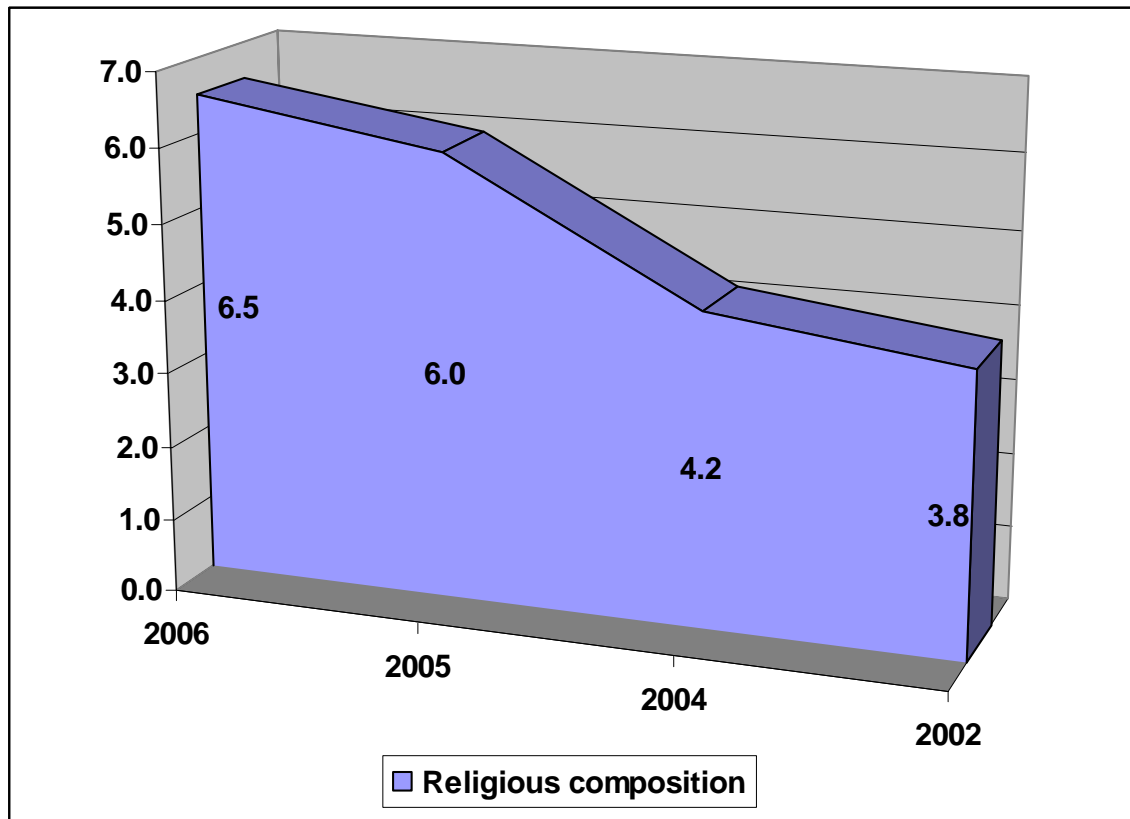
It is important to notice that while respondents include in the top five most important factors the majority of domestic challenges, Albanian economy is still somewhere in the middle of the ranking list - this year with the lowest score (7.94) as compared to any of the previous three "Perceptions & Realities" reports (9.3 in 2002, 8.7 in 2004 and 9.1 in 2005). Accordingly, this is the fourth report confirming that factors related to the consolidation of democratic processes and the rule of law well-functioning are more important than the Albanian economy. Furthermore, for the first time this year respondents believe that economy is less important also as compared to an external factor - EU's stand towards Albania which this year is at 8.43 points.



Referring to the abovementioned arguments, it seems that respondents have been “faithful” to both – the Albanian daily political agenda, often “enriched” with mutual accusations for corruption and links with organized crime, as well as to the constant calls from Brussels to address elections problems, corruption, crime and trafficking. Such an intense debate on these issues has silently removed attention from economic development. Without any prejudice to the importance of the aforementioned problems, the surveyed categories as well as Albanian politics in general still can not identify the appropriate and necessary importance to the economic development, which in view of the present socio-economic concerns in the country should certainly be higher than this year’s rank.

It is interesting to note that while the Progress of decentralization (7.12) and the Regional situation (6.72) have preserved the last year’s ranking, they simultaneously score less than in 2005 (8.5 and 7.9 respectively). Surprisingly, Religious composition - the least important factor since 2002 onwards – continues to gain importance over the years, culminating in 2006 with a 6.52 score. See Figure 21.

**Figure 21: Importance of Religious Composition: General Sample 2002 - 2006**

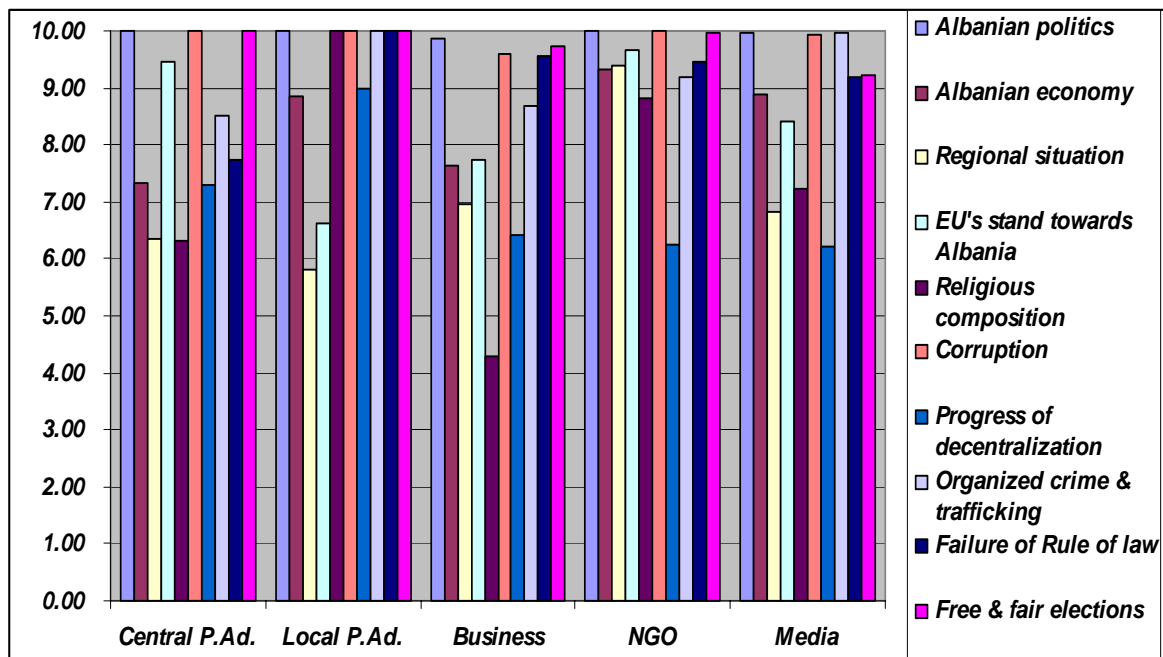


The figure above suggests that Albanians are becoming increasingly aware of several aspects of the “European” debate: the Union’s “undeclared” religious character, the future of enlargement policy, EU borders etc. The prospect of *Muslim* Turkey for EU membership constitutes one of the hottest topics and in this sense, the religious aspect is certainly an important factor put forward since 2005. The Eurobarometer surveys (Autumn 2005 and Spring 2006) as regarding Europeans’ support for further enlargement

conclude that Albania is the second least “preferred” country to enter EU (with Turkey enjoying least support).<sup>12</sup> These aspects and “concerns” raised in the frames of the debate regarding the future of EU and the enlargement policy, have been often presented to the public by the Albanian media and they obviously have had an impact on the general perceptions in the country where most of the population is Muslim.

The same trends regarding the importance that respondents attach to each determining factor are evident across the five surveyed categories – most of domestic factors are of primary importance in the EU integration process. In all categories, Albanian politics is scored above nine, while the four subsequent factors (corruption, free and fair elections, organized crime and trafficking, and failure of rule of law) are scored above eight, except for the scoring of “failure of rule of law” by respondents from the central administration which is - 7.7. See Figure 22.

**Figure 22: Factors Important for Albania’s EU Membership 2006 - Categories**



The data suggests that Albanian politics is the top concern for all the surveyed categories as it obtains the maximal score within the respective category, though in most cases except for the business category, this factor shares its top position also with other concerns such as: corruption, free and fair elections, organized crime and trafficking etc. Namely, the central and local administration, the business and the NGO sector hold that Albanian politics, free and fair elections and corruption are the most important factors for Albania’s EU membership. The media sector has more or less the same opinion on the top three most important factors, except the fact that organized crime and trafficking take the third place, while free and fair elections are the next most important factor. The

<sup>12</sup> In both surveys Albania has a small share of only 2% more support than Turkey from Europeans (EU25). Eurobarometer Autumn 2005 results are: 33% support for Albania’s accession versus 31% for Turkey; while according to Eurobarometer Spring 2006 the ratio stands at 41% support for Albania and 39% for Turkey. The data are available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm).

religious composition is the least important factor only for the central administration and the business sector, while respondents from local administration believe that the situation in the region is the least important one. The remaining two categories – NGOs and Media – hold that the least important factor for Albania’s EU membership is the progress in the decentralization process, with a score of approximately 6.2 points in both categories. Albanian economy still remains out of the top five most important factors for all of the categories included in the survey which is generally in accordance with the general evaluation.

Regardless of the rating within each category, it is worth mentioning that all factors are part of the top five (domestic) concerns of the general sample which reinforces the last year’s conclusion that the European integration process is being increasingly perceived as a process that starts in Albania and ends in Brussels and not vice versa.

○ **Perceptions and Information on EU**

In order to assess perceptions on EU, respondents were read five statements on EU and asked to evaluate them on an increasing scale of 1 to 10, where the highest number denotes the highest degree of agreement with the statement. The first two statements pertain strictly to EU as an organization, and they attempt to assess to what extent EU is viewed as a democratic organization and to what extent it is seen as a source of peace and security in Europe. The other three deal with EU and its impact on the economy and democracy of countries outside EU. Of particular interest here is also the degree to which respondents see EU as an open organization for other European countries.

Differently from the previous “Perceptions & Realities” reports, for the first time this year EU scores the highest in the fourth statement - EU promotes economic development in countries outside EU – simultaneously bearing the lowest standard deviation. See *Table 6*.

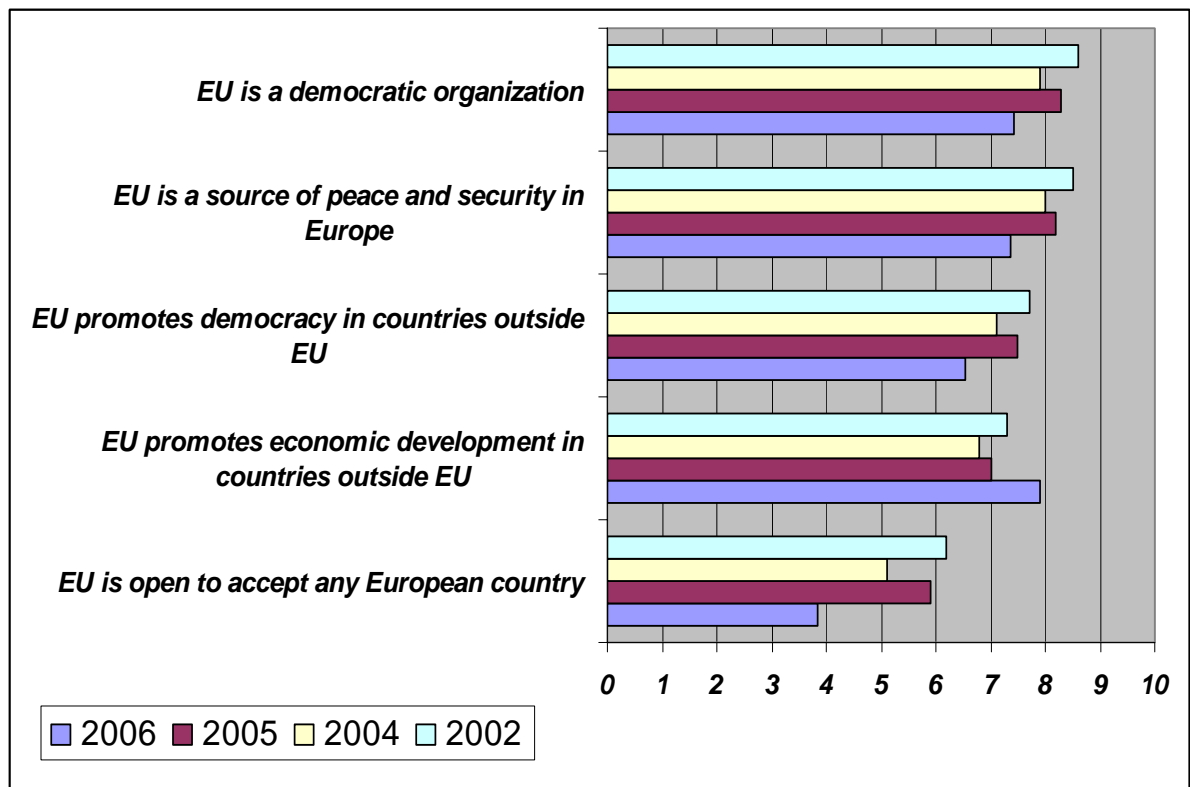
**Table 6. EU Values – General Sample 2006**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
EU is a democratic organization	7.44	2.07
EU is a source of peace and security in Europe	7.36	2.25
EU promotes democracy in countries outside EU	6.55	2.58
EU promotes economic development in countries outside EU	7.9	2.04
EU is open to accept any European country	3.84	2.42

It is interesting to notice that there is a declining trend in the scores attached to the aforementioned statements as compared to 2005; except in the case of this year’s highest rated statement - EU promotes economic development in countries outside EU (from 7 last year to 7.9 in 2006). This decline has been almost uniform by approximately one

point in the first three statements, while for the last statement (EU is Open to accept any European country) there is a drop of around 2 points (from 5.9 in 2005 to 3.84 this year). The alternations observed in the findings, especially when compared to previous years (See Figure 22) might be attributed to amelioration on the respondents' knowledge about EU and the integration process. Furthermore, the recently signed Stabilization and Association Agreement with EU has also opened the debate on the new dimension (phase) of the European integration process in Albania, thus raising expectations for more EU assistance in the economic development. On the other hand, the heated European debate on the enlargement policy (EU borders), on the decision for Romania's and Bulgaria's accession, the Serbian SAA negotiations (called off by Brussels earlier this year), the pending decision about Macedonia's accession negotiations, has influenced not only the last statement's position in 2006 (EU is open to accept any European country) but also its lowest score on a 1 – 10 scale (currently at 3.84). Accordingly, respondents seem to become more and more aware on the fact that EU will make no "discounts" when it comes to fulfilling the necessary criteria. See Figure 23.

**Figure 23: EU Values: Comparative view in the General Sample - 2002, 2004, 2005 and 2006**

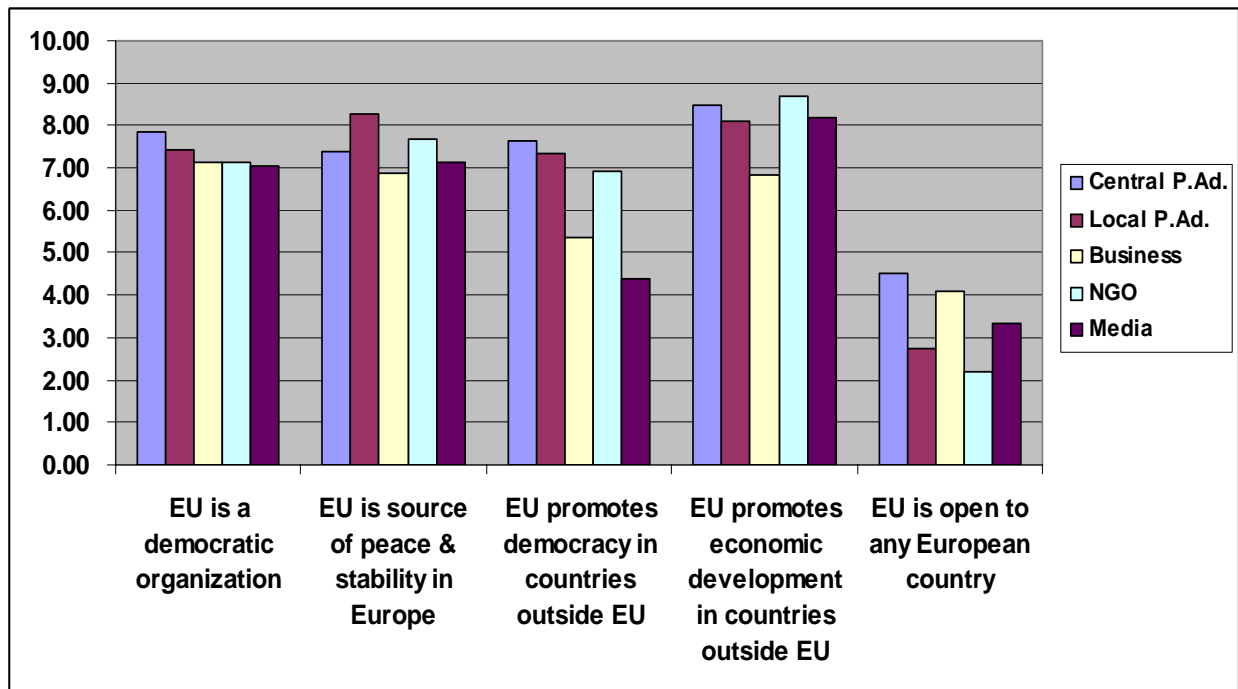


Despite the shifts in each statement's rating and the generally high opinion on EU as an organization since 2002 onwards, this year's data show less positive perceptions on EU in all aspects except as regarding its role in the economic development of countries outside the Union. Such a tendency does not necessarily mean that Albanians have a "low opinion" about EU, regardless of the distinction between EU's role within its borders and outside the Union. Considering the previous findings of the survey - Albania's

international partners, Support for EU membership etc. – it becomes clear that such tendency simply confirms the respondents’ sense of prudent optimism. Nevertheless, the signing of the SAA in June 2006 has obviously exceeded the limits of such prudence and it may have raised expectations about a more active support from EU in the economic development of the country. On the other hand EU’s role in promoting democracy outside the Union still preserves the previous years’ tendency – lower scores than EU as a democratic organization and as a source of peace and security in Europe.

The answers of the general sample are largely reflected in each category included in the survey. As shown in Figure 24 (see below) EU’s role in the economic development outside the Union scores the highest in all categories except in the case of local administration (positioned in the second place) and the business community (third place). Categories assign relatively high scores also in the first two statements, while they provide the lowest score for the last – EU is open to any European country. *See Figure 24.*

**Figure 24: Perceptions on EU according to categories – 2006**



It is important to notice that EU scores the highest in the Central public administration category with a total of 35.87 point, while it received the lowest scores in the Media category- 30.09 points. Compared to one year ago, it becomes clear that the difference between the maximal and minimal total score has dropped from -13.37 last year to -5.77 in 2006, which means that the gap between categories’ overall assessment has shrunk.

The above data reflect the perceptions of respondents on EU as an organization and its impact on third countries. In order to assess both the perceptions and the level of knowledge of respondents on EU priorities and goals the respondents were given four goals and asked to evaluate them according to the importance that EU places on each. *See Table 7.*

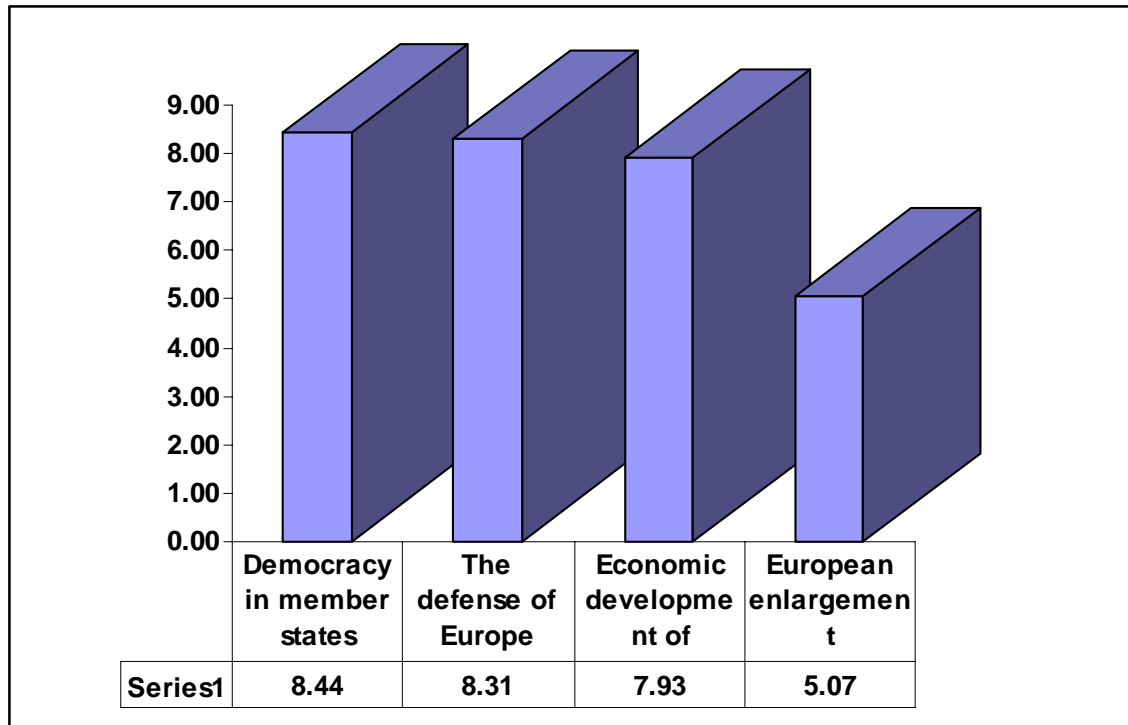
*Question: European Union was founded in order to attain a variety of goals. In your opinion how important are the following goals for the European Union? Please rate in a scale from 1 to 10 bearing in mind that the higher the number the more important you consider the given goal for EU.*

**Table 7: EU Goals for the General Sample – 2006**

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Economic development of Member States	7.93	2.29
Democracy in Member States	8.44	1.87
The defense of Europe	8.31	1.94
European enlargement	5.07	2.37

As the table indicates, all EU goals except the third on (Defense of Europe) are perceived as less important than one year ago (less scored). In view of the previously described debate in EU on several enlargement issues, as well as considering the *traditional* tendency demonstrated in all “Perceptions & Realities” reports, it is no surprise that EU scores the lowest in enlargement also in 2006. The 5.07 score attached to this goal constitutes the lowest score ever assigned by respondents, though with the highest standard deviation – 2.37 (which is 0.01 points more than in 2005). The most important goal for EU is perceived to be *Democracy in member states* (8.44), which last year came second. Surprisingly, the last year’s most important goal - Economic development of Member States - has been evaluated with a 7.93 score, which means only a third place in 2006. These data are graphically presented in Figure 25 below. *See Figure 25.*

**Figure 25: EU Goals for the General Sample – 2006**



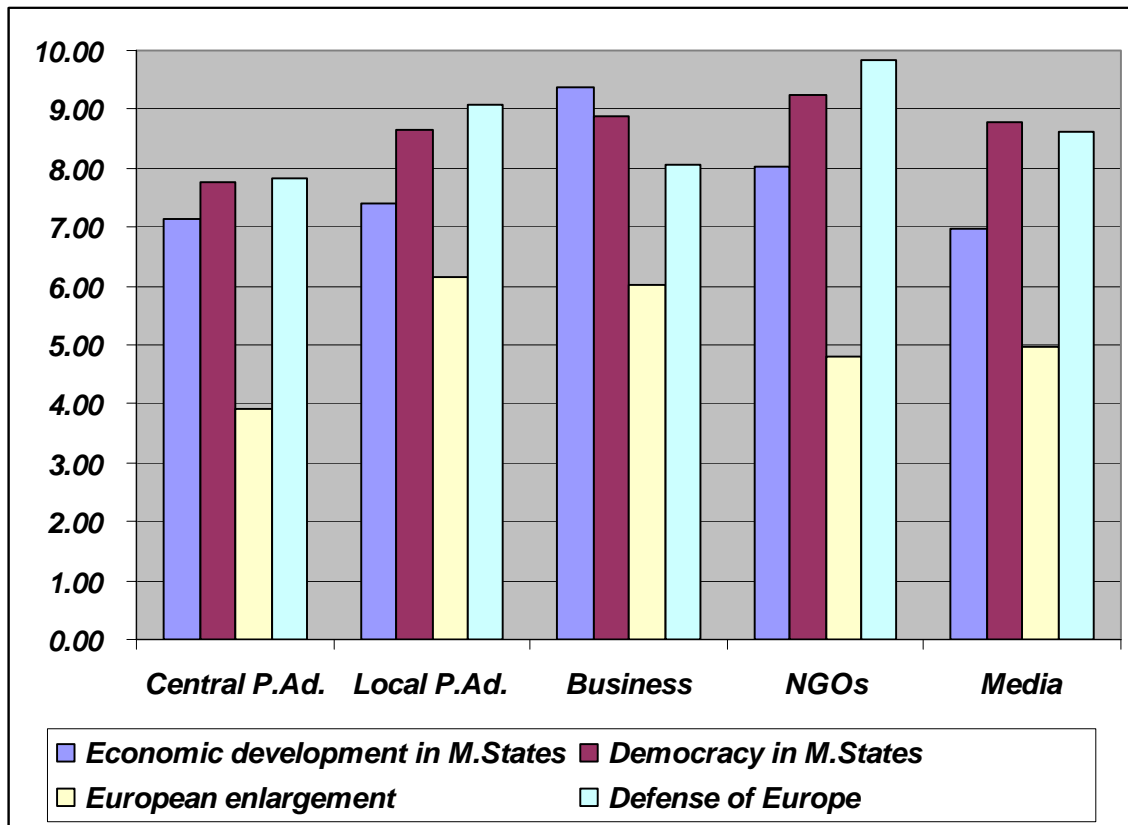
Although the *Defense of Europe* as a goal has always been the third most important goal in all “Perceptions and Realities” reports, this year it comes as the second most important goal with a 8.31 score, which is by 0.5 points higher than in 2005 (7.8) and 0.1 points more than the highest score (8.21 points in 2004) ever attached to this goal in all AIIS surveys since 2002. It is interesting to notice that the two most important EU goals display also the lowest standard deviation (*See Table 7*).

The reasons for such a shift in this year’s rating of EU goals – *democracy and defense rather than economic development* - may be well related to the continuous debate on today’s worldwide security threat – terrorism. It is important to notice that Albanian media have often broadcasted not only the debate on Europe’s vulnerability as regarding terrorist attacks, but also the actual steps taken by EU to strengthen its response to this threat throughout the member states, particularly following the terrorist attacks in London (July 2005). Furthermore, even the enlargement debate (Turkey’s EU accession) has been accompanied with a security dilemma – the fact that EU borders would then reach quite “unstable” areas such as Iraq and Iran or even Syria’s terrestrial border. Nevertheless, the economic development of member states as a goal still scores quite high, which confirms that EU’s core pillar - internal market - is not underestimated.

However, if the data is being considered across categories it becomes clear that only the Media category displays the same rating of EU goals as the general sample. Surprisingly, the Defense of Europe as a goal has been attached the highest score by the Local and Central public administration and by the NGOs category – 7.83, 9.08 and 9.84 respectively. Understandably, the business community is rather more interested in the economic development of the member states this year – evaluated with a 9.38 score in this category. Except for the Media group, respondents from all the surveyed categories agree on the second position for Democracy in member states. The only pattern that all

categories share in this sense is the fact that they all place the enlargement as a goal in the last position (lest scored goal throughout all categories). See Figure 26.

**Figure 26: EU Goals According to Categories - 2006**



It is interesting to notice from the above figure that EU goals score the highest in the Business sector (a total of 32.36 points), and the lowest in Central Public Administration with a total of 26.65 points, which almost six points less than the minimal total score one year ago (Central public administration with a total of 32 points).

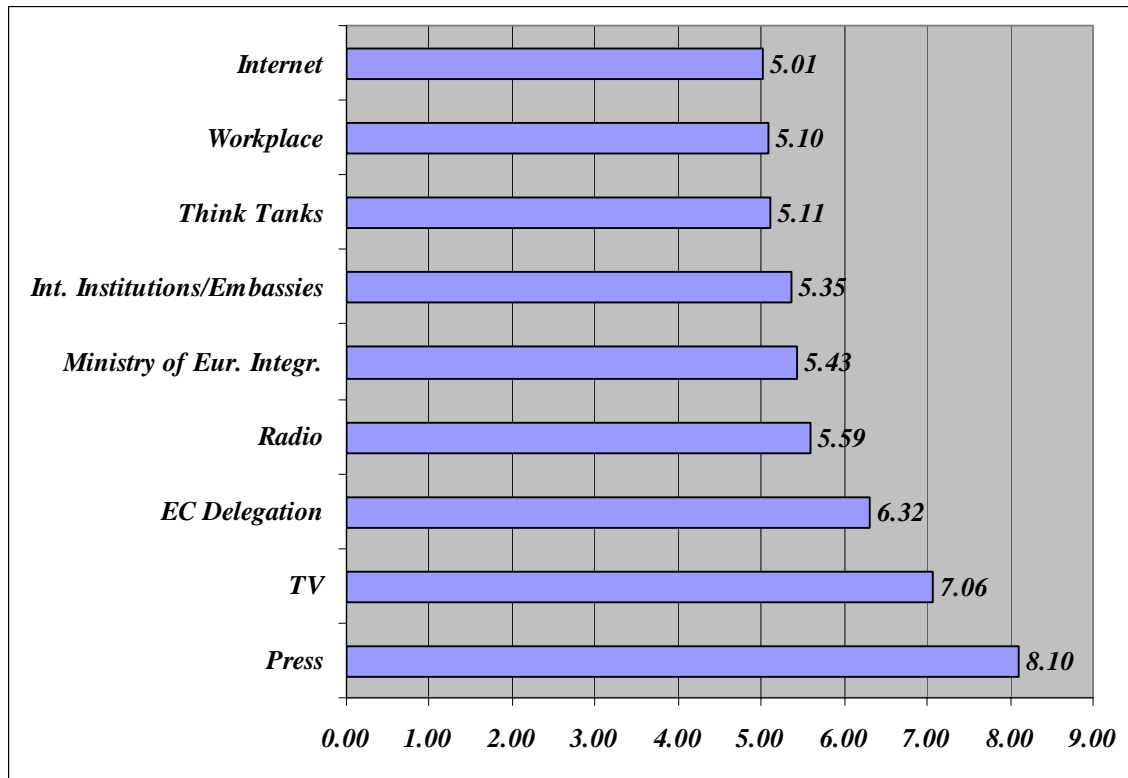
○ **Information and Awareness:**

In order to achieve more insight regarding the level of information and understanding of respondents, we tried to identify the sources of information from where respondents receive information on EU and whether they are interested in acquiring more knowledge on the subject. With regard to this question, the questionnaire used in this year's survey has included also the Albanian Ministry of European Integration (fifth place with a score 5.43 points) replacing thus the "Conversations" as a source of information used in the previous surveys (2002 to 2005). The data suggests that there are two major changes as regarding respondents' rating of information sources. Firstly, although the media (TV and the press) is (are) still the main source of information, this year the press (newspapers) take the lead over the television which has been the most important source of information for three years in a row since 2002. While the TV as a source of information notes a



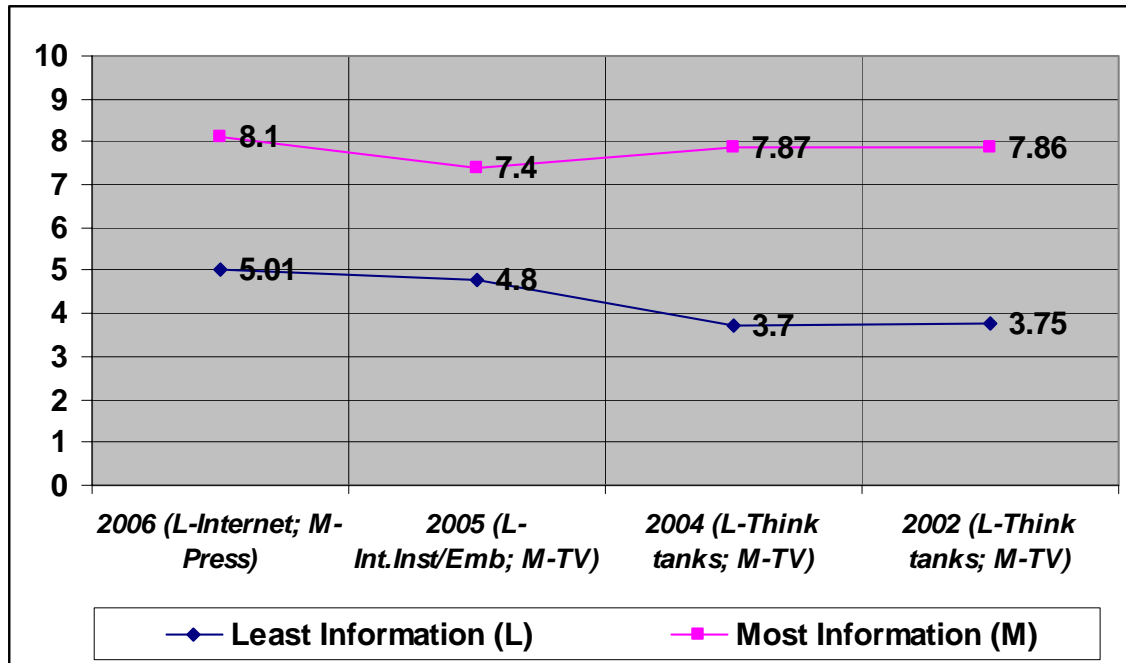
decrease of about 0.3 points as compared to one year ago (from 7.4 in 2005 to 7.06 in 2006), this year's most important source – the press, has gained in importance from 6.7 in 2005 to 8.10 one year after. The EC delegation in Tirana continues to gain importance and it notes in 2006 the highest score (6.32) by occupying the third place which in 2005 was reserved for Internet as a source of information. This leads to the second major change in the “Perceptions & Realities 2006” which is the fact that Internet (in the third place since 2002) this year becomes the least used source of information on EU, scoring less than in any of the previous surveys, approximately 5 points. See Figure 27.

**Figure 27: Sources of Information on EU – General Sample 2006**



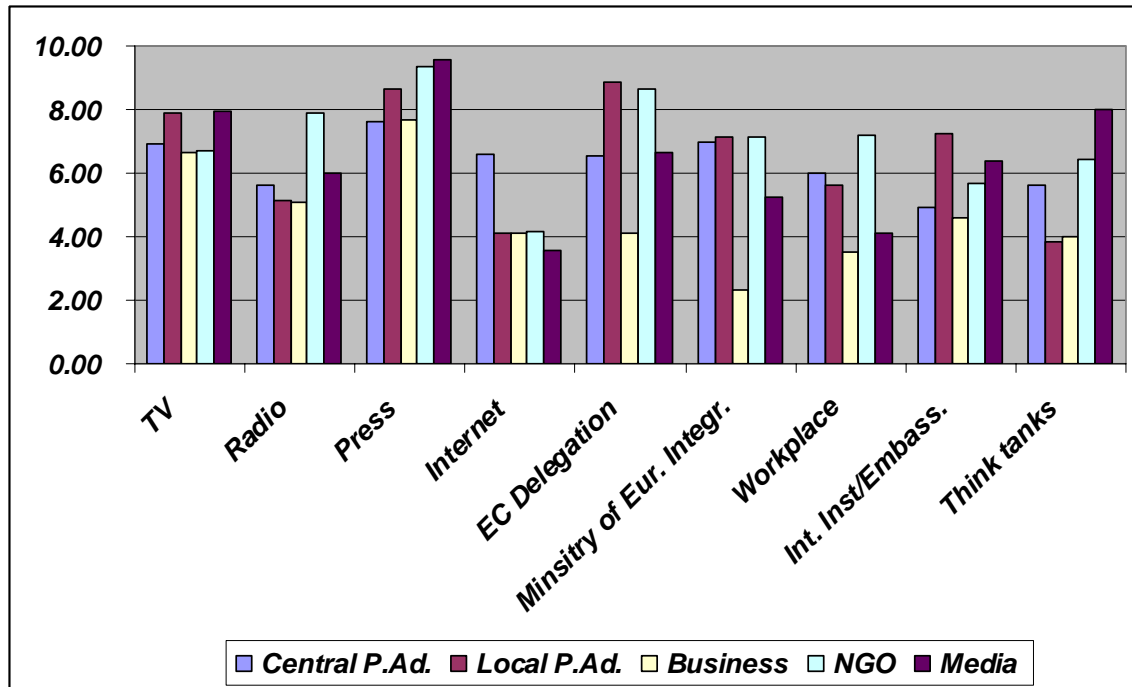
It is important to notice that Albanian media (TVs or newspapers) has always been the most important source of information about EU. The surveys' data since 2002 onwards have constantly confirmed the first two positions for TVs and newspapers (media). On the other end of the spectrum, such uniformity is not present in the case of the *least used source of information* – in 2002 and 2004 being think tanks, in 2005 international institutions and embassies, and surprisingly the internet in 2006. The figure below makes evident also another interesting fact. Namely, in 2006 we are witnessing the highest values ever attached to both, the least and the most important source of information – 8.10 and 5.01. In fact, if compared over the years, these values (with minor exceptions) show that there is a general tendency of a growing importance for the most, as well as the least used sources of information. See Figure 28.

**Figure 28: Most & least important sources in the general sample: 2002 – 2006**



In order to better understand the rating of information sources in the general sample it is important also to explore respondents' evaluation within each category. Unlike the case with the categories' assessment of EU goals - where only Media's rating was in compliance with that of the general sample - the general sample's most important source of information (the Press) is the same in four categories except the local public administration which exploits EC Delegation (8.89) as the primary source of information while newspapers (8.66) come second. See *Figure 29*.

**Figure 29: Sources of information on EU across categories - 2006**



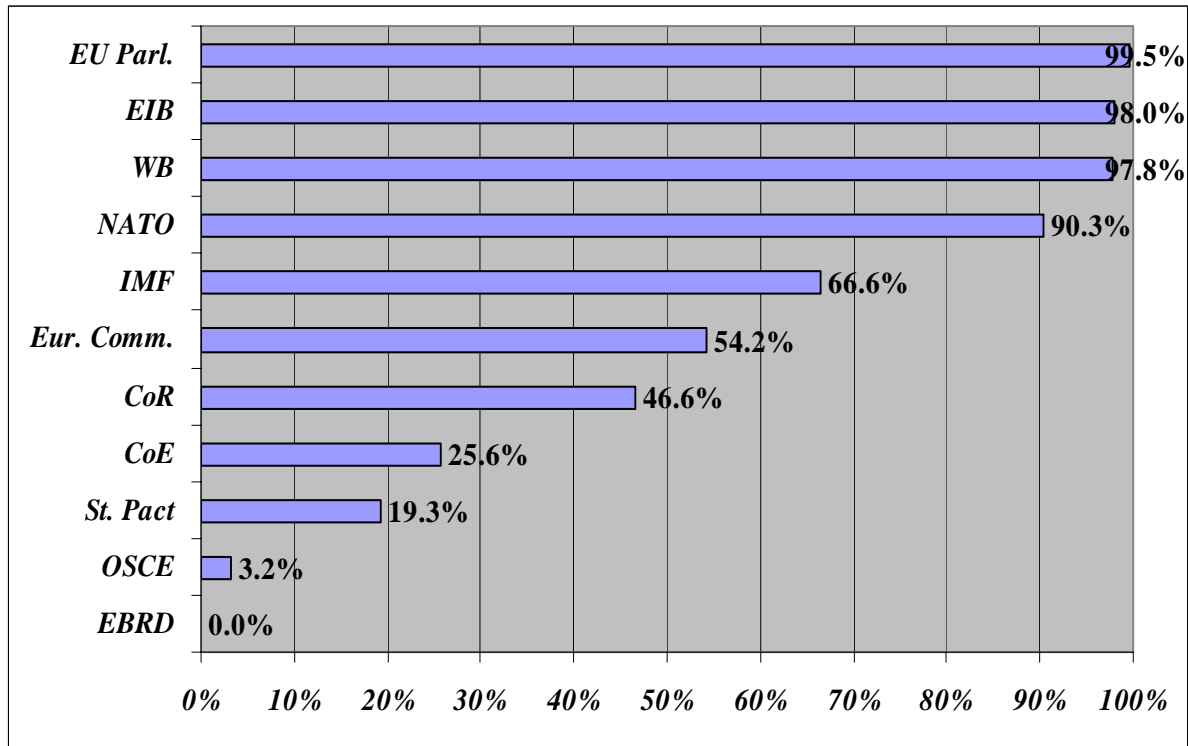
It is interesting to notice that while one year ago NGOs were the main internet consumer in the EU information field, this year appears that internet is least used by NGOs (4.18) and also by the Media sector (3.57). Internet receives low scores across all categories except in the case of central public administration where it comes at the fourth place (6.59). The Ministry of European Integration as a source of EU related information comes at the last place in the business category, which ought to be the main target group by the Ministry in view of the forthcoming Interim Agreement.

In a similar fashion as in 2005, 2004 and 2002, media is the principal means of information on EU-related issues for most of the surveyed categories. In the case of the Media Category, in the perspective of both suppliers and consumers of information: results are interesting – respondents here indicated newspapers (9.58), think tanks (8.00) and TV (7.92) as the main sources of information, while the EC Delegation in Tirana still remains as the next more important source, with an improved score as compared to 2005 (from 5.5 to 6.66 in 2006). The fact that this category itself does not receive enough primary information raises questions as to the validity and value of information made public. Media receives most information from media, thus by itself, creating a closed circle of transmission of information, on which the other categories build a significant part of their knowledge as well. However, there should be emphasized also the fact that the least used source of information for the Media category respondents is the workplace.

In order to test respondents' knowledge on EU and the European integration process, they are further asked whether specific institutions/organizations were part of EU. Their responses to this question provide us with a clearer picture on respondents' acquaintance with EU and its institutions. The figure below graphically presents their correct answers for each institution. See Figure 30.

Question: From what you know which of the following are Institutions of European Union (EU)?

**Figure 30: General Sample's correct answers on EU Institutions - 2006**



As the figure above shows the only institutions for which more than half of respondents answer correctly are the European Commission, European Parliament, EIB and three well-known international organizations – NATO, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Nevertheless we should not rush into conclusions since the first three organizations are very telling examples. For most respondents the word "Europe" or "European" in the name of the institution seems to have been the determining factor in deciding on whether it was an EU institution or not. This might also explain why most people answered incorrectly on Council of Europe (CoE), Committee of the Regions (CoR), OSCE, Stability Pact and EBRD (as well as, why they answered correctly on the World Bank, NATO, and IMF, none of which contains the word "Europe" or "European"). Furthermore, the figure suggests that the percentage of correct answers for the first four institutions is well above 90%, while it drops to 66.6% and 54.2% for IMF and the European Commission respectively.

While the number of correct answers as regarding OSCE was increasing from 2004 (26.5%) to 2005 (round 45%), this year the survey identifies a drastic drop of correct answers to 3.2%. on the other hand, there is an increase in the percentage of correct

answers as regarding the Committee of the Regions (CoR), from 22% last year to 46.6% in 2006.

The table below presents the data on respondents' correct answers across the surveyed categories. *See Table 8.*

**Table 8: EU Institutions - Correct answers for each category (2006)**

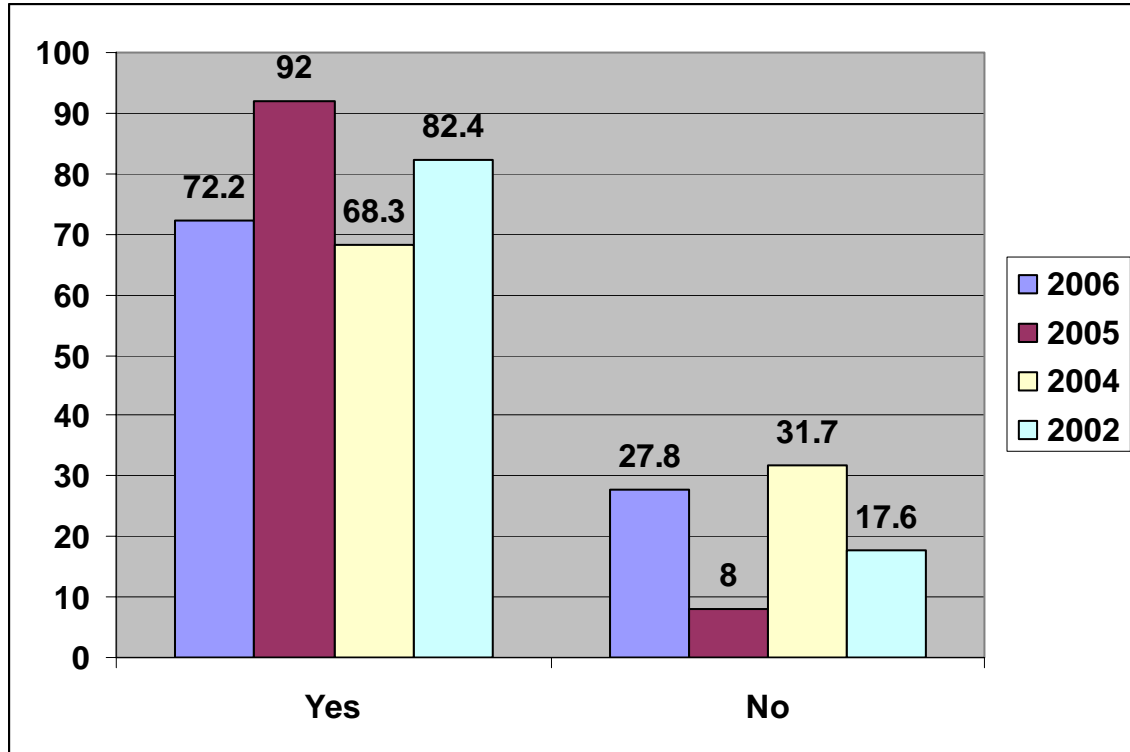
<b>Category</b> <b>Institution</b>	<b>Central P.Ad.</b>	<b>Local P.Ad.</b>	<b>Business</b>	<b>NGOs</b>	<b>Media</b>
<b>Eur. Parliam.</b>	100.0%	100.0%	98.4%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>World Bank</b>	100.0%	100.0%	93.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Eur. Commiss.</b>	60.8%	61.5%	57.3%	28.9%	25.5%
<b>IMF</b>	68.7%	89.0%	59.5%	26.7%	77.4%
<b>Com. of Regions</b>	74.0%	60.4%	14.6%	26.7%	34.0%
<b>NATO</b>	100.0%	100.0%	68.6%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Eur. Inv. Bank</b>	100.0%	100.0%	93.5%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>EBRD</b>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>C. of Europe</b>	10.1%	18.7%	30.3%	84.4%	37.7%
<b>OSCE</b>	0.0%	0.0%	10.3%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Stab. Pact</b>	26.0%	31.9%	12.4%	0.0%	9.4%

Surprisingly, the best-informed category is the Local public administration, which has the greatest value of correct numbers percentage points - 661.5 (only 570 last year), followed by the Central Public Administration (at 639.6 percentage points out of a maximum of 1100 percentage points). This year's results show that the Business community is the least informed category (537.9), closely followed by NGOs (566.7) and the last year's best informed category – Media with 584 percentage points (last year 664).

In order to assess the levels of knowledge and familiarity respondents have with the EU and the process of integration we tested their familiarity with the criterion/requirements that Albania has to fulfill in order to join EU. *See Figure 31.*

Question. In order for Albania to join EU it has to meet certain criterion/conditions, have you heard of them?

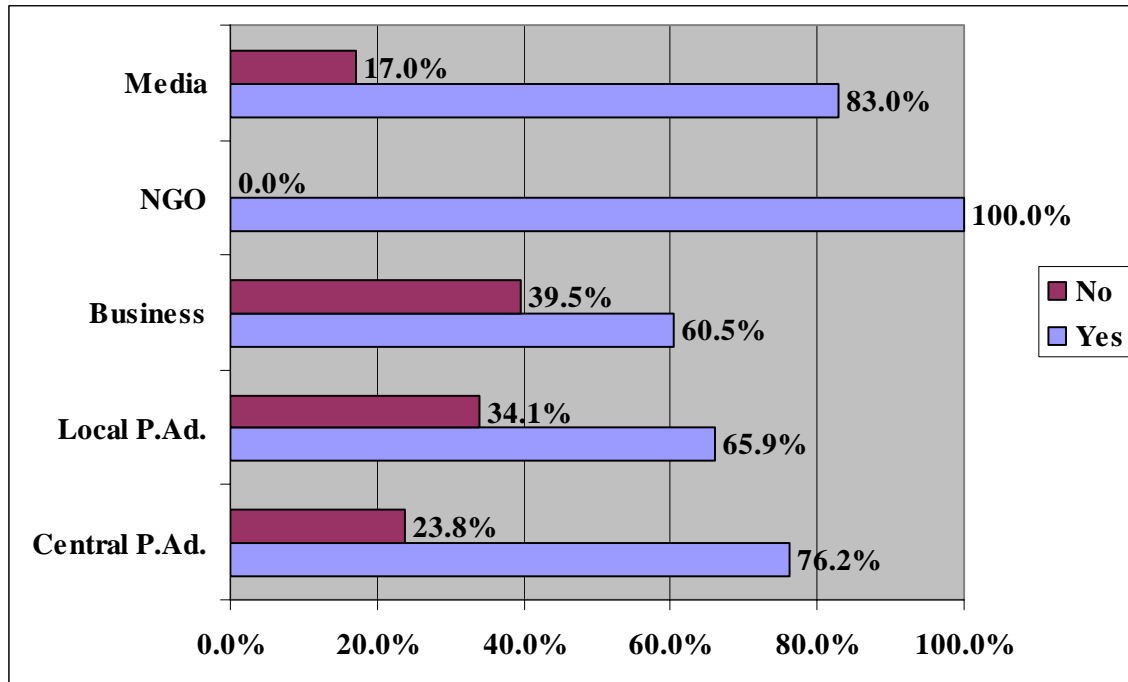
**Figure 31: Familiarity with conditions to join EU, General Sample – 2002, 2004 and 2005**



The figure above shows that respondents’ acquaintance with conditions for Albania to join EU is quite near the pessimistic 2004 level of perceptions and quite away from the highest level of familiarity (2005). While last year’s report assumed that respondents were increasingly becoming aware of the technicalities and complications of the EU integration process, the total of only 72.2% of respondents familiar with the conditions - almost 20% less than in 2005 – puts under a question mark this conclusion in 2006.

With the exception of the NGOs and Media category, the remaining categories reflect the same patterns as the general sample: with the percentage of “Yes” answers varying from 60.5% to 76.2%. See Figure 32.

**Figure 32: Familiarity with conditions to join EU – Categories 2006**

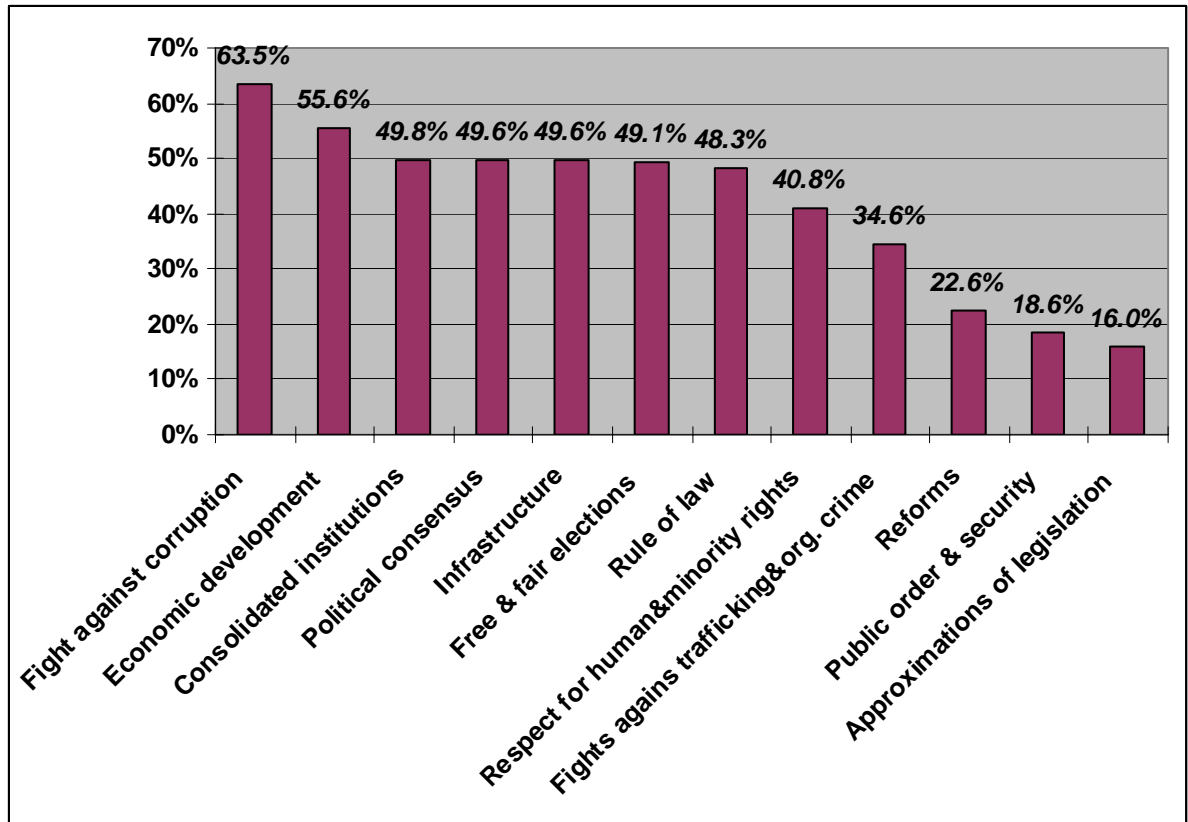


Besides the case with EU institutions (See Table 8), the “least informed category” status for the business community is confirmed also with regard to the conditions for Albania to join EU – smallest percentage of “Yes” answers (60.5) and the greatest share of “No” answers within the group (39.5%). This group is closely followed by the local public administration, which surprisingly was the best-informed category on EU institutions (See Table 8).

In order to test the actual level of information respondents had with regard to EU integration requirements, those who answered “Yes” to the previous question were also asked to rate some of the conditions they had heard of. *See Figure 33.*

*Question: Please mention some of the conditions you have heard of:*

**Figure 33: Conditions for Albania to Join EU – General Sample 2006**



As the above figure indicates, of the numerous conditions that were mentioned, the Fight against corruption and Economic development, have been rated by more than half of respondents. These conditions are closely followed by another set of conditions which have been rated by round 49% of respondents, and they include: Consolidated institutions, Political consensus, Infrastructure, Free and Fair elections and the Rule of law. There are some major changes as compared to respondent's answers one year ago. The last year's priorities – Rule of law (64.8%) and Fight against organized crime & trafficking (62.2%) – have lost their positions and now are at the seventh and ninth position respectively with 48.3% and 34.6%. Economic development jumps from third position in 2005 (52.5%) to the second position this year, right after the Fight against corruption. Free and fair elections have preserved their last year's position but with a rather improved percentage of respondents, which is actual also for the Respect for human & minority rights (from 28.8% to 40.8%) and Reforms (from 17.7% to 22.6%). However, the last two conditions have obviously lost position as compared to one year ago.

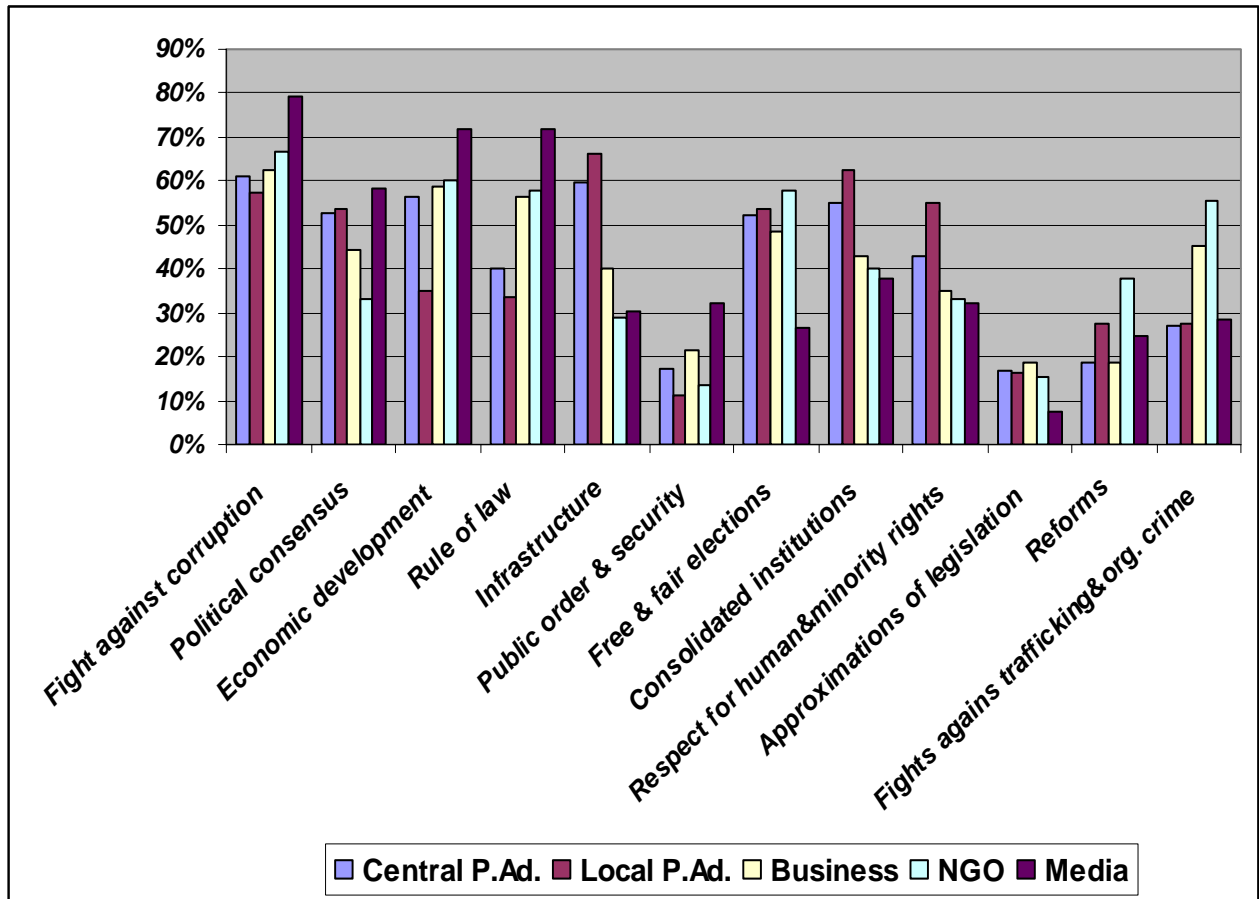
There should be emphasized the fact this question is open and respondents' answers do not necessarily portray the exact answers over the years: property law for instance this year has not been mentioned, although in 2005 it was declared by 29.3% of respondents. Furthermore, while democratization has not been mentioned this year neither, several aspects of this process are certainly present (consolidated institutions or even political consensus). Accordingly, while certain core conditions remain present over the years (economic development, free and fair elections, approximation of legislation etc.)



respondents also tend to rate *new entries* which are often a result of the general socio-political debate in the country (corruption, infrastructure, political consensus, public order etc).

Figure 34 shows the distribution of requirements mentioned first across all categories. As shown in the figure, the rating of the abovementioned conditions in the general sample is also valid in most of the categories. *See Figure 34.*

**Figure 34: Conditions to Join EU – Categories 2005**



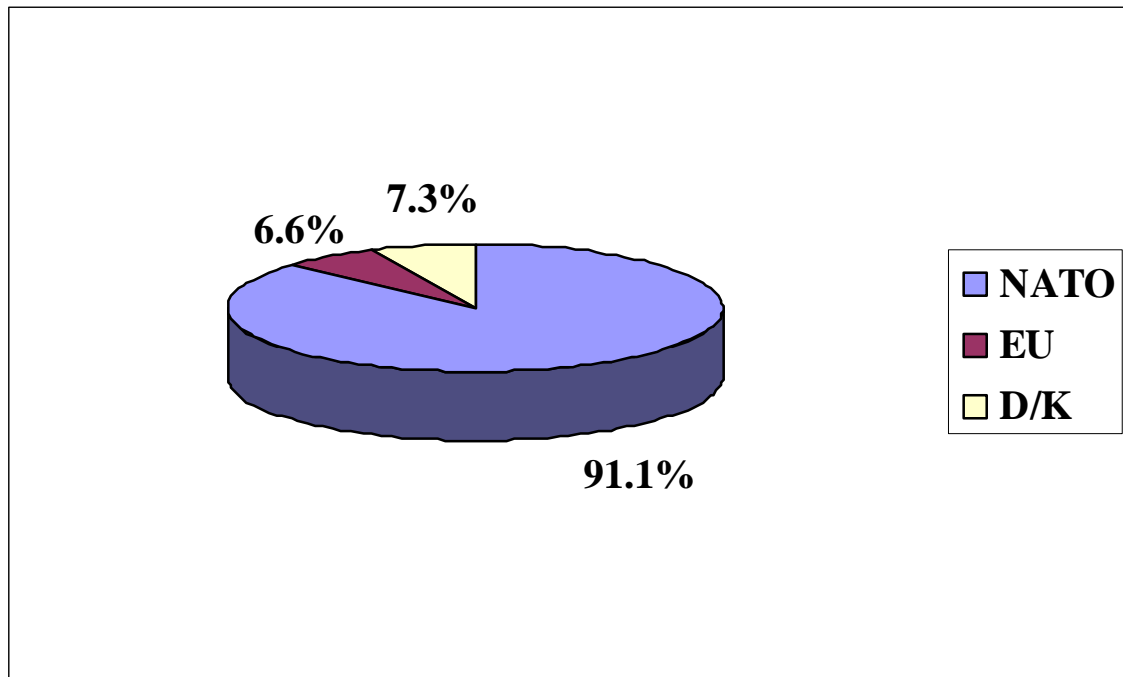
Fight against corruption is the most rated condition in all categories except the local public administration category where infrastructure comes at the first place. Public order and security remains the least rated condition in the categories of NGOs, Business and local public administration, while the remaining two categories display the lowest rating for the approximation of legislation. In general, the distribution of answers across categories shows an increasing familiarity of respondents with the EU integration process and furthermore a relatively uniform tendency of rating across categories.

This was also clearly reflected when respondents were asked whether Albania will join first NATO or EU. In 2005 the number of people who said that Albania will first join NATO and later EU was much higher than in 2002, though smaller than in 2004. While

in 2005 only 8% of respondents answered that Albania will first join EU, this year this group of respondents amounts only 6.6%. See Figure 35.

*Question. Albania is trying to become a member of EU as well as NATO. In your opinion which of them will Albania join first NATO or EU?*

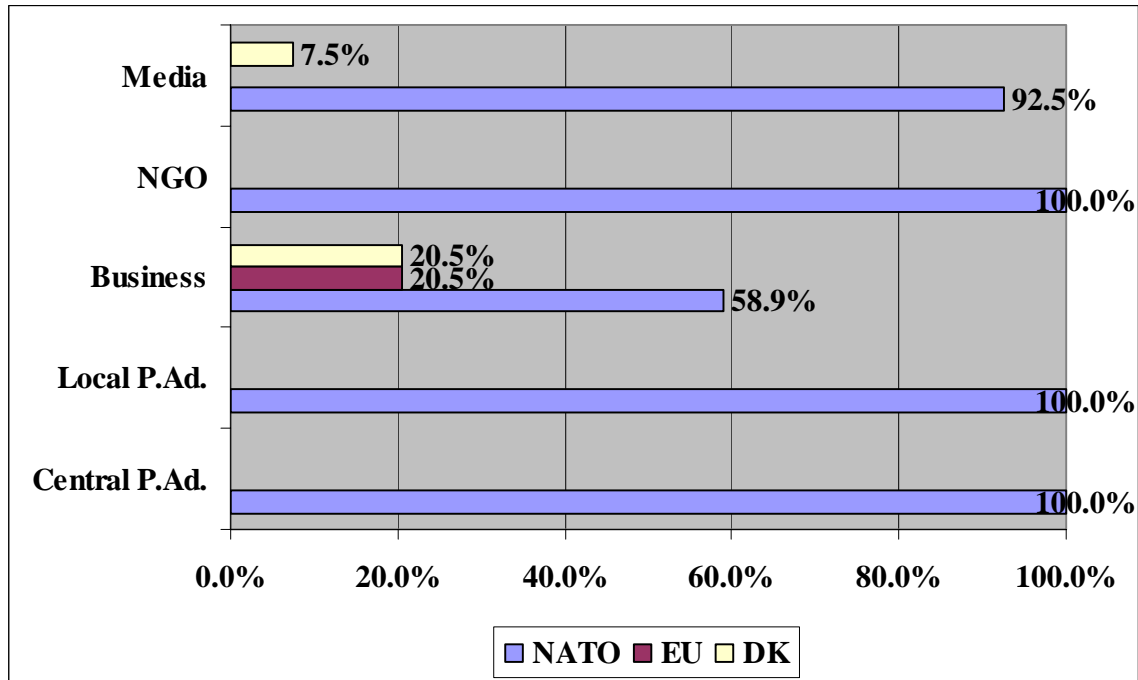
**Figure 35: Albania’s Membership in NATO and EU – General Sample 2006**



The above answers clearly indicate an increasingly more comprehensive understanding of the EU integration process. As the figure above indicates the percentage of those who think Albania will first join EU has dropped to barely 6.6% and so has the percentage of those who don’t know (from 13.5% in 2005 to 7.3% this year). Whereas we cannot say for sure which organization will the country join first (or whether it will join), an empirical consideration would indicate that the prospect of joining NATO before the EU is more probable, both because that has generally been the pattern experienced in other Eastern European countries and also due to the fact that criteria to join NATO are less exigent than those to join EU. Furthermore, this year the “NATO membership option” notes the highest percentage of respondents ever, which confirms the increasing tendency from 2002 to 2005.

Answers in the general sample reflect those received in each of the categories. In all the categories the majority of respondents answered that Albania will first join NATO and then EU. See Figure 36.

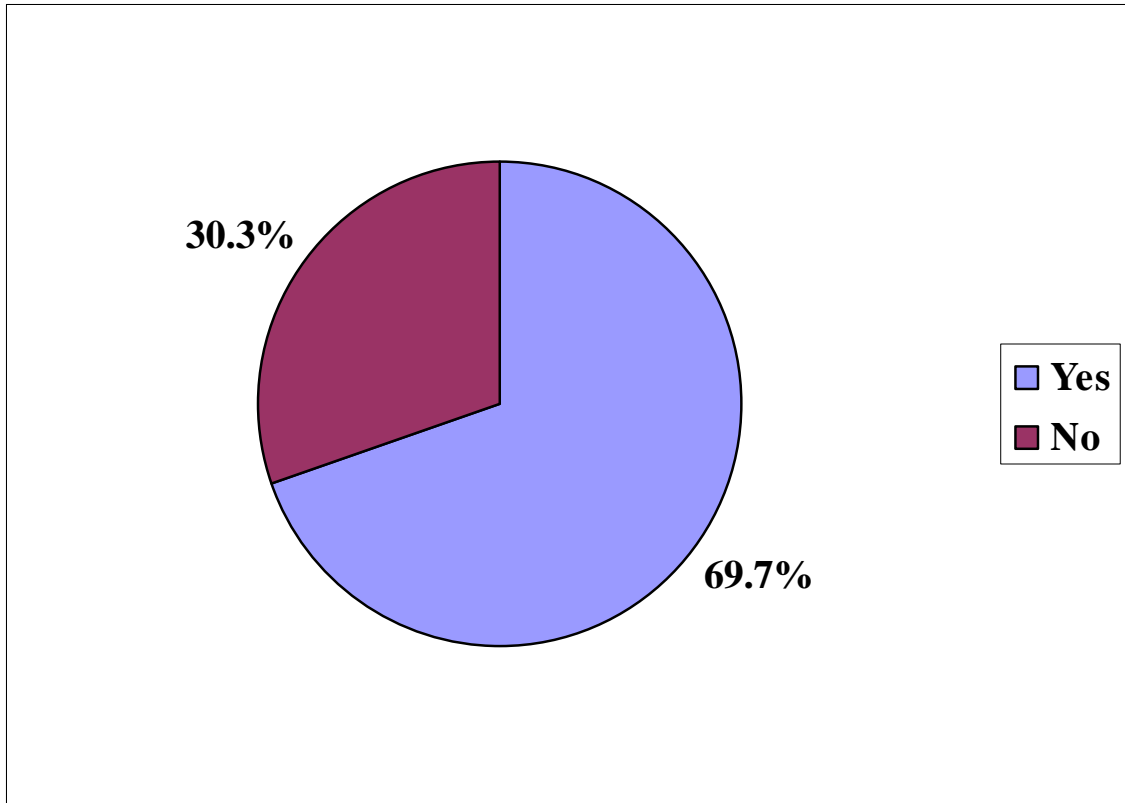
**Figure 36: Albania’s Membership in NATO and EU – Categories 2006**



As the above figure shows, Business category and Media are the only ones who still have doubts about this issue, while the remaining three categories are 100% confident that Albania will first join NATO. Namely, 7.5% of respondents from the Media category don't have an answer to this question while in the case of the Business category this group amounts 20.5%. Furthermore, there are as much respondents (20.5%) in the Business sector who actually believe that Albania will first join EU and only 58.9% who think it will first be NATO membership.

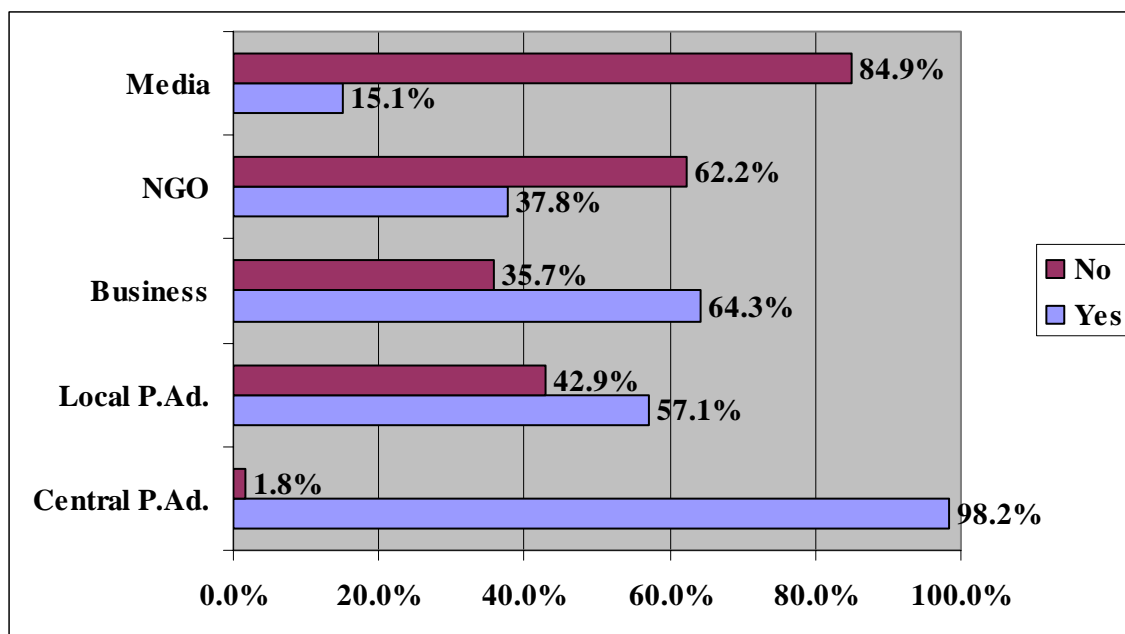
It is important to emphasize that this year the survey has identified the smallest share of respondents who are interested in receiving more information on EU as compared to any of the previous "Perceptions & Realities" reports since 2002. Namely, while the percentage of respondents interested in receiving information has always been well beyond 80%, only 69.7% of them respond positively in 2006. *See Figure 37.*

**Figure 37: Level of interest on EU information – General Sample 2006**



The general decreasing tendency in the level of interest for EU related information is present also within categories. Except for the Central public administration category which notes a sharp increase in the level of interest as compared to 2005, all the remaining surveyed groups demonstrate lower interest than one year ago. *See Figure 38.*

**Figure 38: Level of Interest on EU Information– Categories 2006**

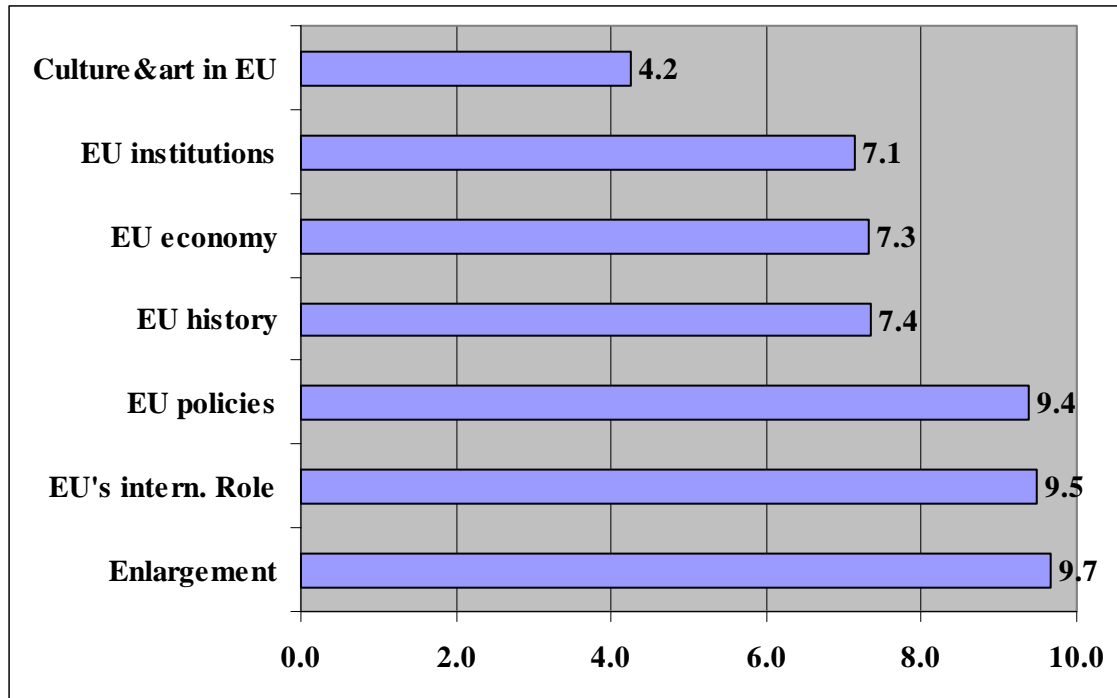


Those interested to receive more information on EU were also asked in what areas they would like to receive more information. It is interesting to mention that the 2005 top three EU related areas remain the same also in 2006, but this year with higher scores. On the other hand, the scores as regarding the remaining areas have decreased if compared to one year ago. As the figure below shows the area in which respondents were more interested was EU enlargement. The score of EU Enlargement, (9.7) has increased by 0.3 points as compared to 2005 (9.4 out of 10), which is very indicative of the great interest respondents have on such a process. Such an interest does not come as a surprise given the high levels of support for Albania's EU membership, the expectations from Albania's EU membership and the general desire for the process to move faster.

EU policies and EU's role in the international arena have switched places – now the latter takes the second place, while the last year's second positioned area (EU policies) takes the third place. Culture and arts in EU remains the least interesting area for respondents and this year it also notes the lowest mark. *See Figure 39.*

*Question. The information on EU covers different areas. How interested would you be to receive information on the areas shown below? Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the higher the number, the more interested would you be to receive information on the given area.*

**Figure 39: Level of Interest on EU Information According to Area – General Sample 2005**

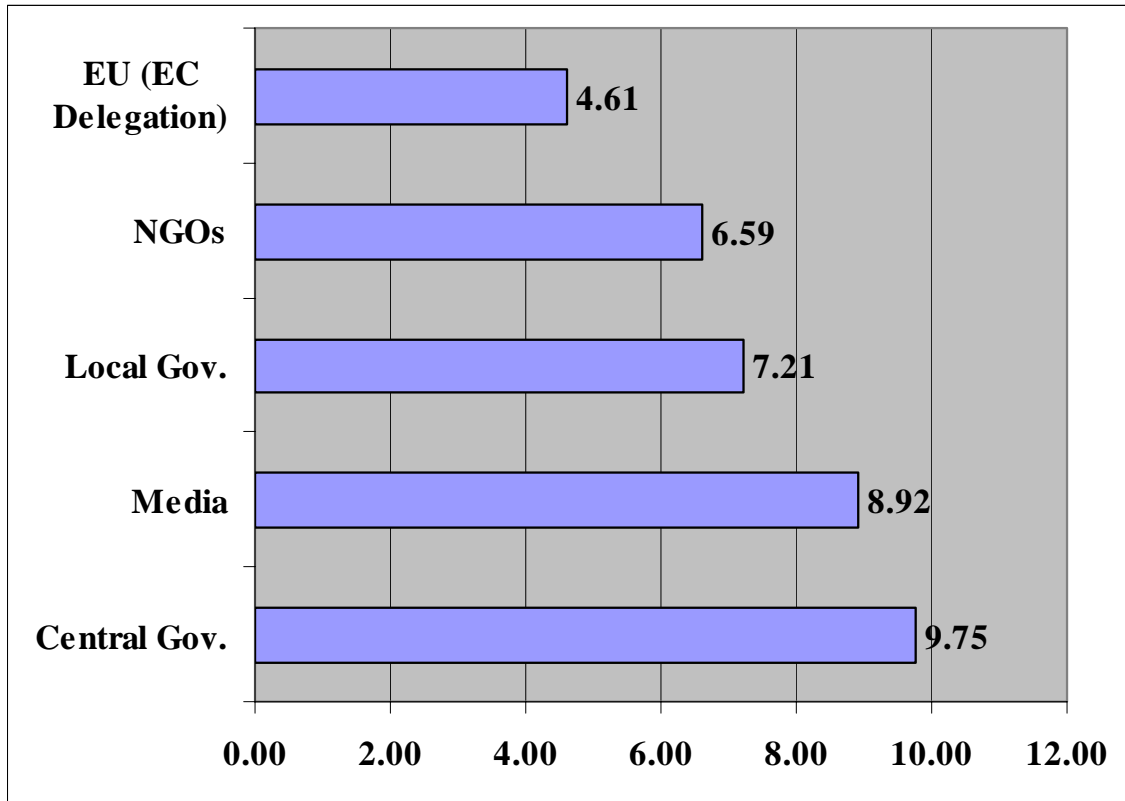


Finally, this year's survey for the first time introduces a particular question as regarding the responsibility to provide EU and EU integration related information by certain important actors involved in the integration process, such as the central and local government, EU through the EC Delegation in Tirana, NGOs and the Media. Out of the five main actors, respondents hold the central government as the main body with the highest level of responsibility for providing such information – with a 9.75 score out of 10. Getting back to the *Sources of Information* data presented in the Figure 27 (above) - although the central government authorities are considered the main body responsible for providing EU related information to the public, the Ministry of European Integration comes at the fifth place out of the ten sources of information that respondents use to learn about EU (See Figure 27). Furthermore, while the media (Press and TV) are the primary sources of information, respondents hold that this sector is less responsible than the central government, though, still an institution that bears considerable responsibility – i.e. it occupies the second place with a 8.92 score. Local government is also believed to have a great degree of responsibility (third place with a 7.21 score), closely followed by NGOs scoring 6.59 out of a maximum of 10. Surprisingly, the EC Delegation in Tirana has the least responsibility (4.61) to inform the Albanian public, although this institution comes at the third place of the most used sources of EU related information in Albania. See Figure 40.

*Question: Please evaluate the level of responsibility of each institution given below for providing information related to EU and European integration matters. Please evaluate*

in a scale from 1 to 10, bearing in mind that the higher the number the more responsible you consider the given institution.

**Figure 40: Responsibility for providing information on EU and European integration – General Sample 2006**

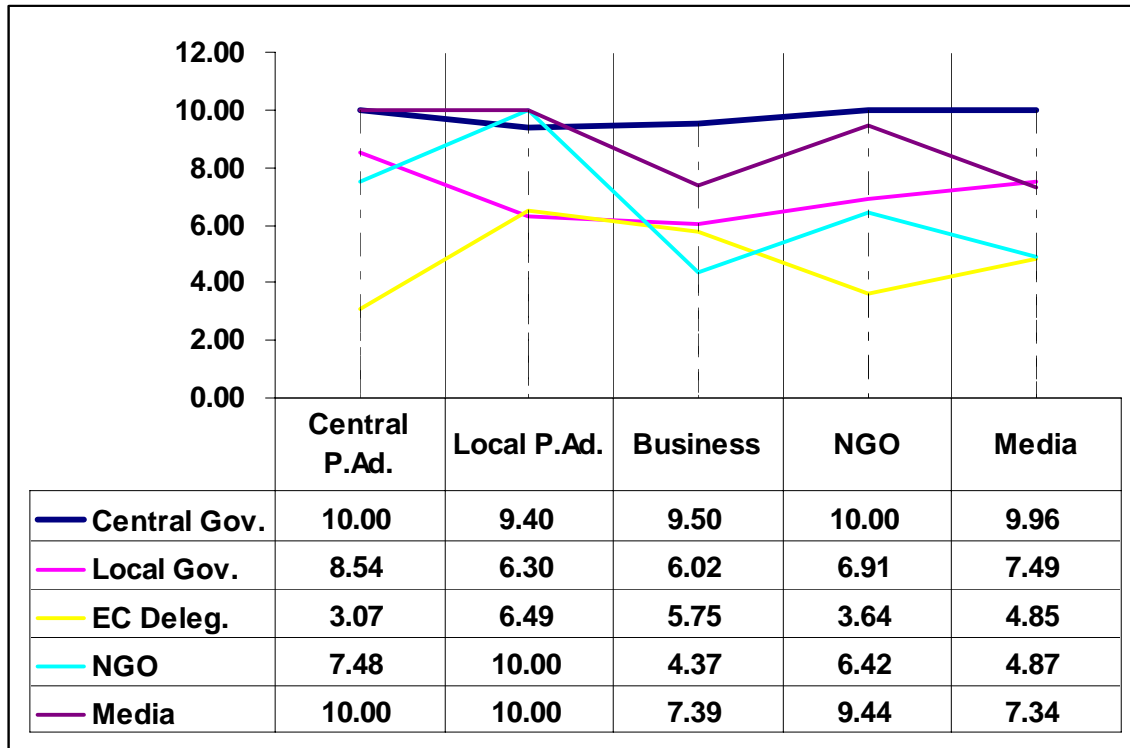


Except the local public administration category which holds NGOs and Media with the highest degree of responsibility (10 score), all remaining categories reflect the same patterns as the general sample – central government as the first responsible institution. It is also interesting to notice that while all categories (apart from the local administration) put in the second place according to the responsibility it bears the Media, respondents from this category believe that not only central authorities, but also local government are more important than them.

Furthermore, only respondents from NGOs, Media and Central administration categories believe that EC delegation is least responsible for the informing process in the country, while according to the Business category this holds true for the NGO sector. On the other hand, while NGO, Media and Central public administration show a *bon sens*e in assuming a relatively high degree of their own responsibilities, respondents from the local public administration category believe that local government should bear the smallest degree of responsibility as compared to the other institutions, although other

categories put this institution as the second (by the Media category) or the third most responsible institution (by the Business, central administration and NGO categories). The figure below graphically presents the data on the degree of responsibility for each institution (portrayed with colored lines in the graph) across categories (placed on the horizontal axis of the graph). *See Figure 41.*

**Figure 41: Responsibility for providing information on EU and European integration – Categories 2006**





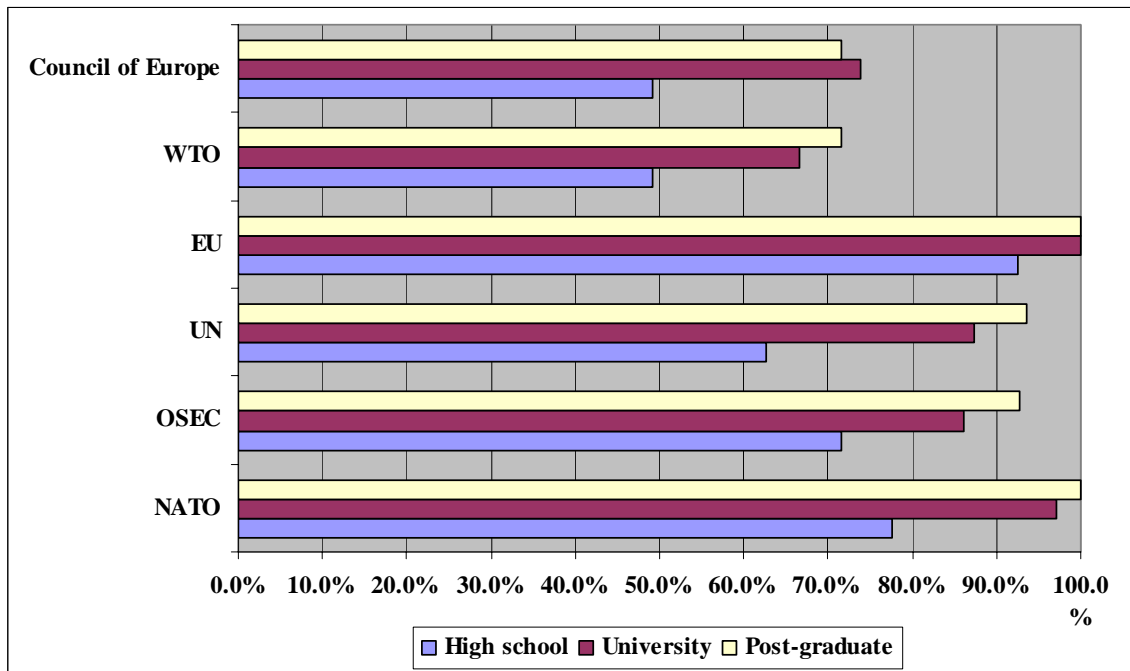
## VI. ANALYSES

As in previous years, the survey was based on the assumption that there is a direct relationship between the educational level of respondents and their level of knowledge of EU as an organization and the process of EU integration for Albania. The assumption was behind our choice of target groups, sampling techniques and its testing will guide the direction of our future research on populations beyond these target groups. We tested this assumption in three areas: respondents knowledge on Albania's membership in international organizations, EU institutions, and the specificities of Albania's EU integration process.

### Education Levels and Knowledge of International Institutions, EU, and EU Support

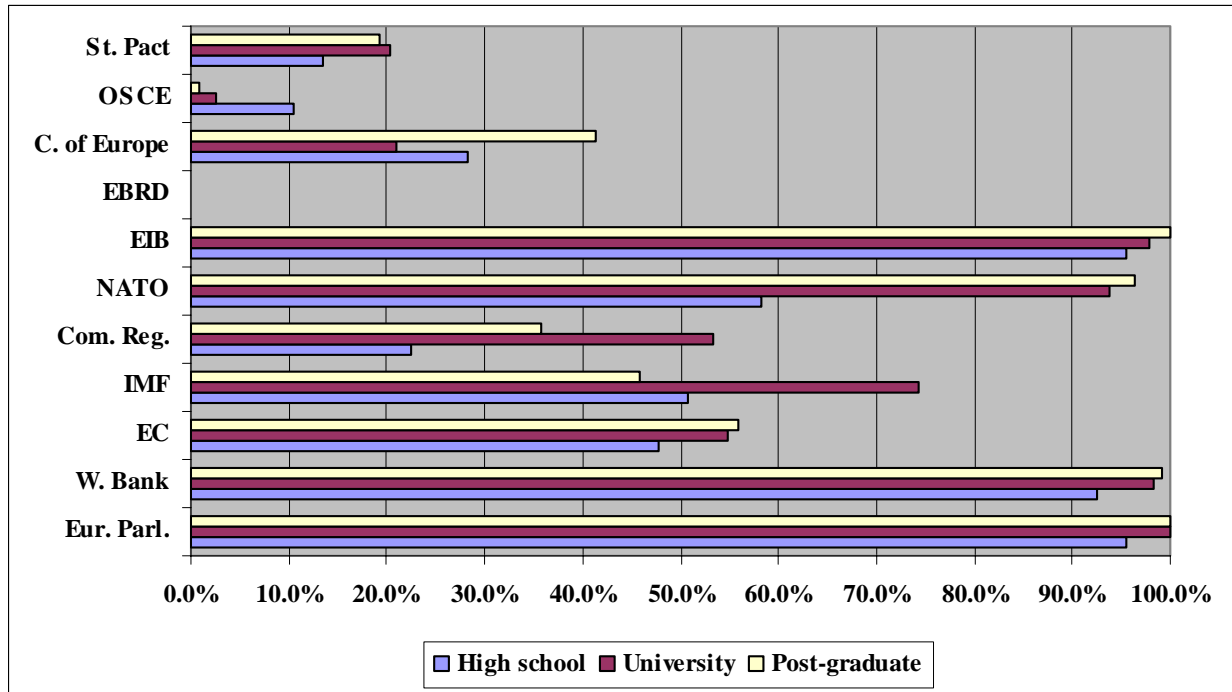
Figure 1 shows the percentages of correct answers to Question 6. Of the six international organizations mentioned, Albania is a member of the OSCE, UN, WTO, and the Council of Europe. Our hypothesis on the direct relationship between education levels and knowledge of Albania's membership in international organizations proves correct in all but the Council of Europe where the percentage of correct answers for university-educated respondents is slightly higher than those of post-graduate respondents. Similarly as in 2002, 2004, and 2005, there continues to be a direct relationship between the two variables.

**Figure 1: Is Albania a Member of the Following Institutions? (% of correct answers according to education)**



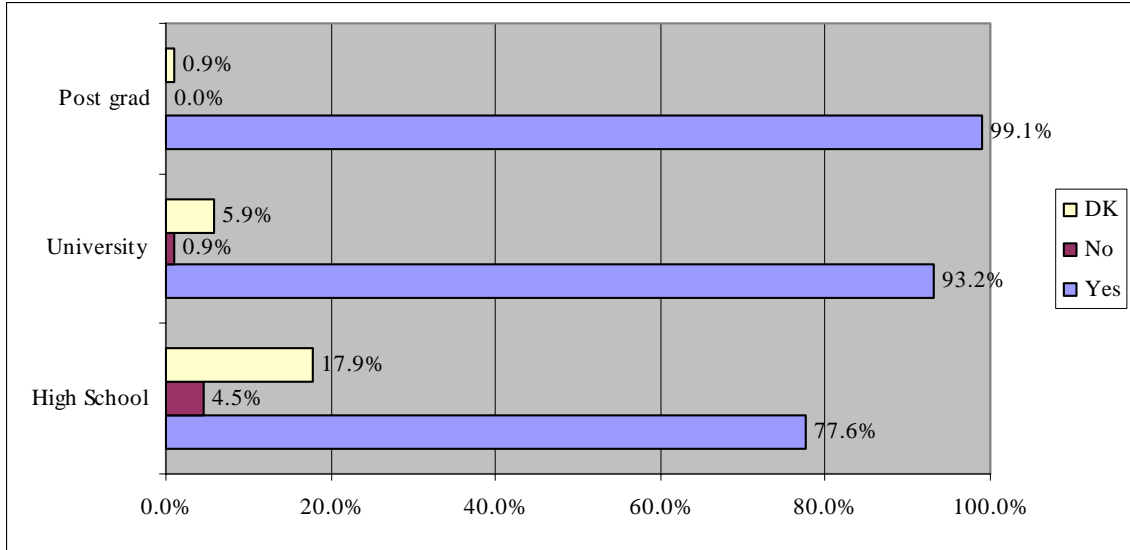
Overall, the same correlation holds when respondents are asked to differentiate between EU and non-EU institutions. *Figure 2* displays the correct answers for each international institution and the correlation holds for the European Parliament, the World Bank, the European Commission, NATO, and the European Investment Bank. For the Stability Pact and Committee of the Regions the direct correlation is not so clear. While respondents with university education are clearly more knowledgeable than those with high school, the marginal value of post-graduate education is not as apparent.

**Figure 2: Which of the Following Institutions are EU Institutions? (by level of education)**



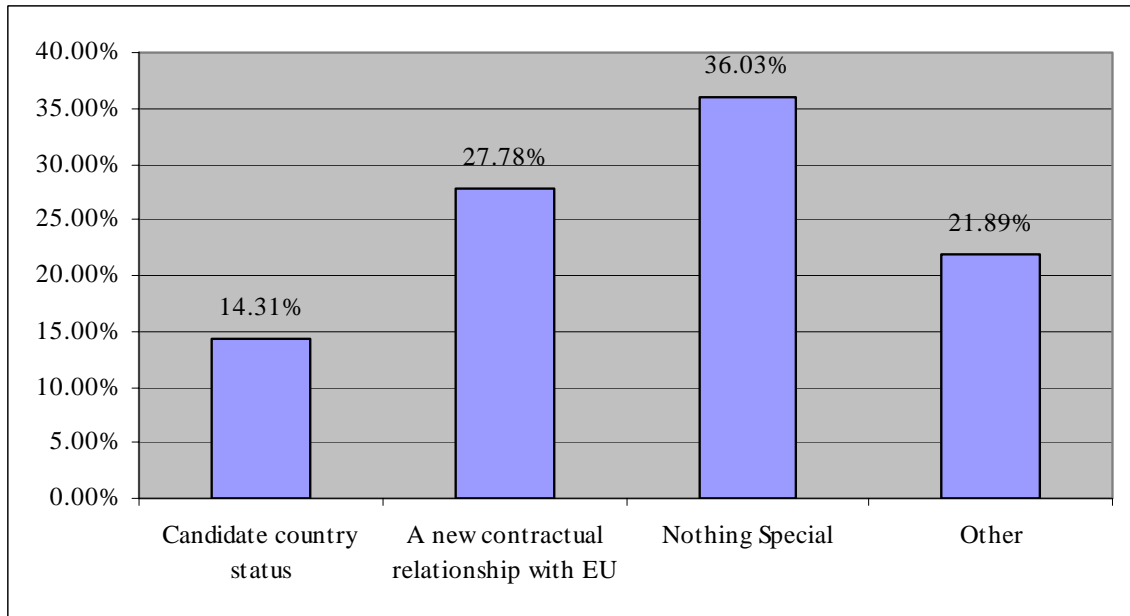
*Interestingly, the more educated the respondents were the more in favour of immediate EU membership for Albania they were as well. The direct positive relationship between EU support and education levels is clearly portrayed in Figure 3 where support jumps from 77.6 percent for respondents with high school education to 93.2 percent for those with some university education to 99.1 percent for post-graduates. It is reasonable to assume that a national survey would show lower levels of EU membership support than the present survey with relatively well-educated target groups.*

**Figure 3: Support for EU Membership and Education levels**



Of those respondents that were aware of the completion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) by Albania with the EU, only 27.8 percent defined it correctly as a new contractual relationship with the two countries. This may not be so worrying as only 14.3 percent thought the SAA gave Albania candidate country status. Since a majority either classified it as “nothing special” or “other” a majority of respondents that were aware of the signing of SAA were uncertain as to what the SAA meant for the relationship between Albania and the EU. (See Figure 4)

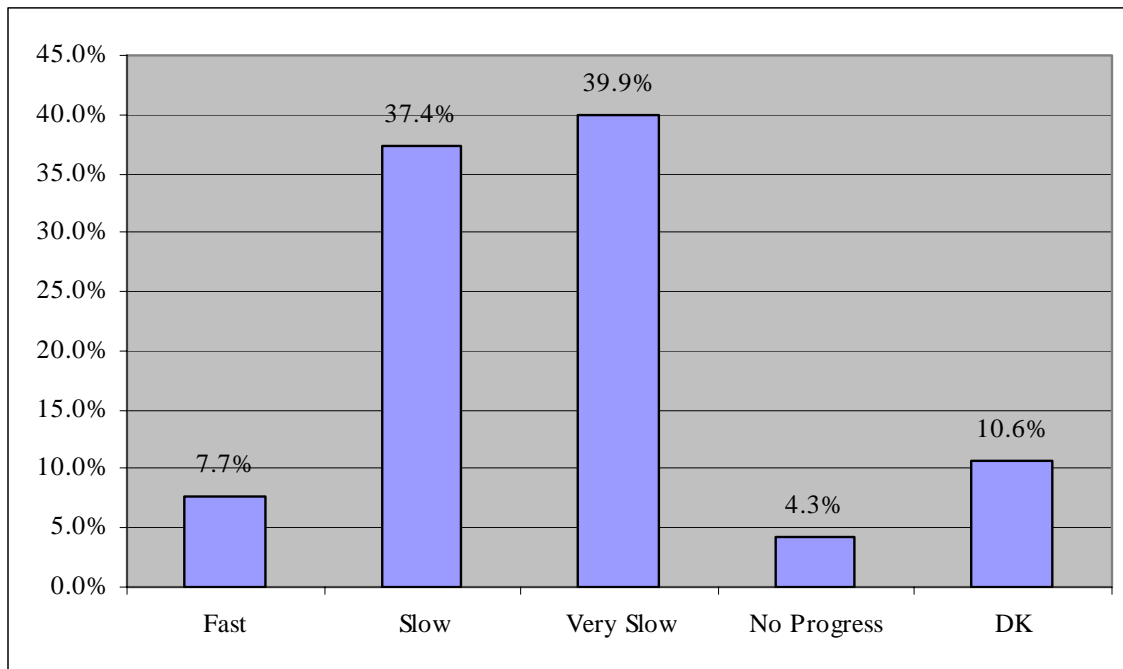
**Figure 4: Knowledge of Signing of SAA and Knowledge of SAA (Question 23 vs. Question 24)**



## Perceptions on Albania’s Progress towards EU Membership

Figure 5 shows the perceptions of those respondents that would vote “yes” on a referendum for Albania’s EU membership on Albania’s progress towards EU integration. While very few respondents think that Albania is making no progress (4.3 %), the overwhelming majority, 77.3 %, think that Albania is progressing either “slowly” or “very slowly.” As the survey was carried out one month after the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), these balanced perceptions show that the target groups have realistic expectations on Albania’s progress towards the EU.

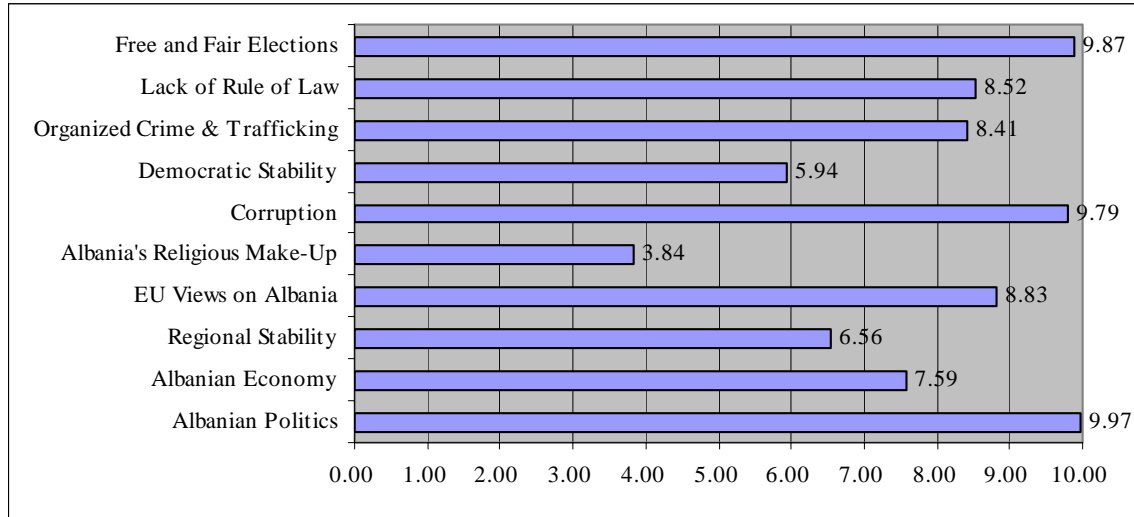
**Figure 5: Pro EU Integration vs. Estimate of Progress (Q 11 vs. Q19)**



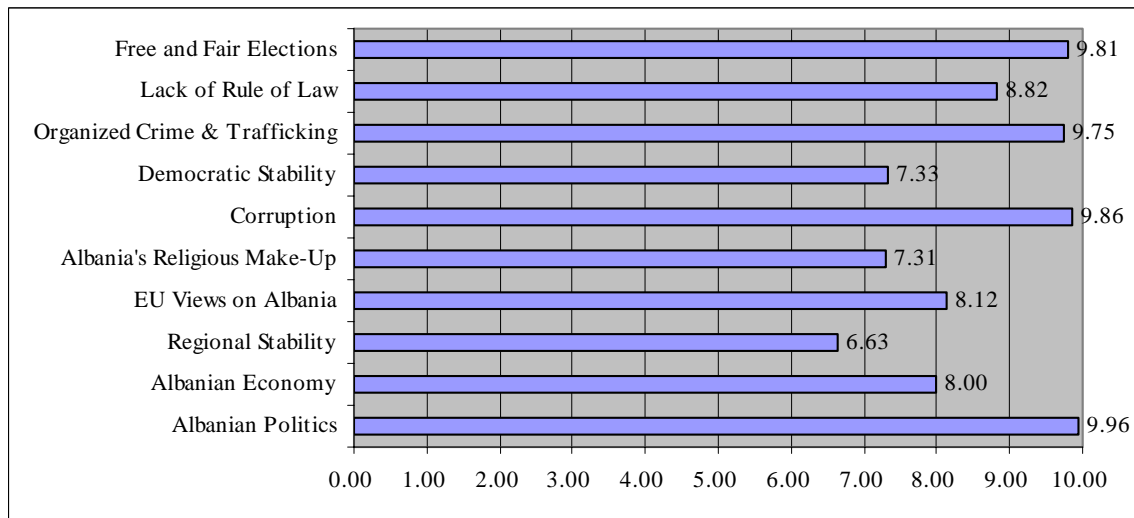
Figures 6 and 7 show that there is hardly any difference in the way respondents that think that Albania is ready for EU membership (Figure 2) or is not yet ready (Figure 3) estimate the importance of different factors on Albania’s EU integration process. Thus, while those that think that Albania is ready estimate that “politics”, “elections” and “corruption” are the three most important factors on the country’s integration progress. While those that think that Albania is not yet ready—the overwhelming majority of respondents—believe that “politics”, “corruption”, and “elections” are the three most important factors in descending order. This means that even those that may have unrealistic perceptions about Albania’s readiness to integrate in the European Union have a realistic perception on the factors that have proved to be most important in Albania’s progress. All groups agree that tangible progress on the fight against corruption and a more consensual politics that would guarantee free and fair elections are the most immediate factors that would speed up Albania’s integration process. Differences exist only in the estimation of factors that are least important. While those respondents that

think that Albania is not yet ready for membership evaluate “regional stability” as the least important factor on Albania’s progress, those that believe that Albania is ready for EU membership believe that Albania’s “religious make-up” is the least important factor. In both cases, we are dealing with structural factors on which Albania can have little impact (regional stability) or no impact at all (the country’s religious make-up) and therefore, these factors are rightly perceived as having little importance.

**Figure 6: Albania is ready for Membership vs. Factors that Impact Progress towards EU Membership (Q 14 vs. Q 22)**



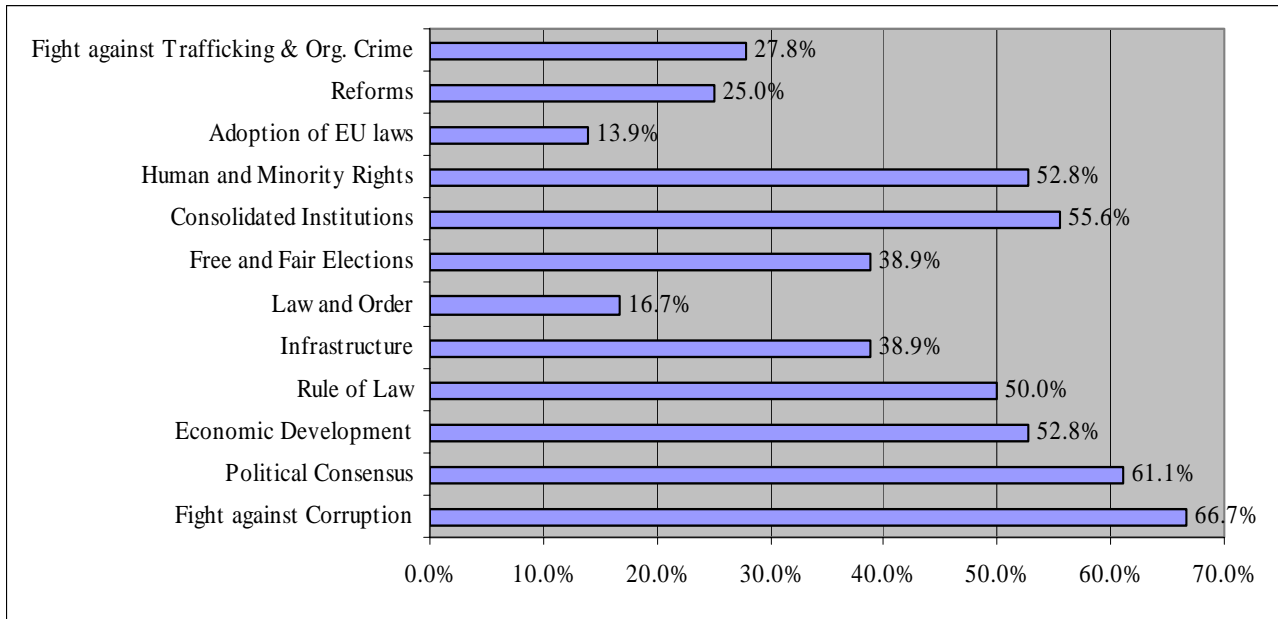
**Figure 7: Albania is not ready for EU Membership vs. Factors that Impact Progress towards EU Membership (Q 14 vs. Q 22)**



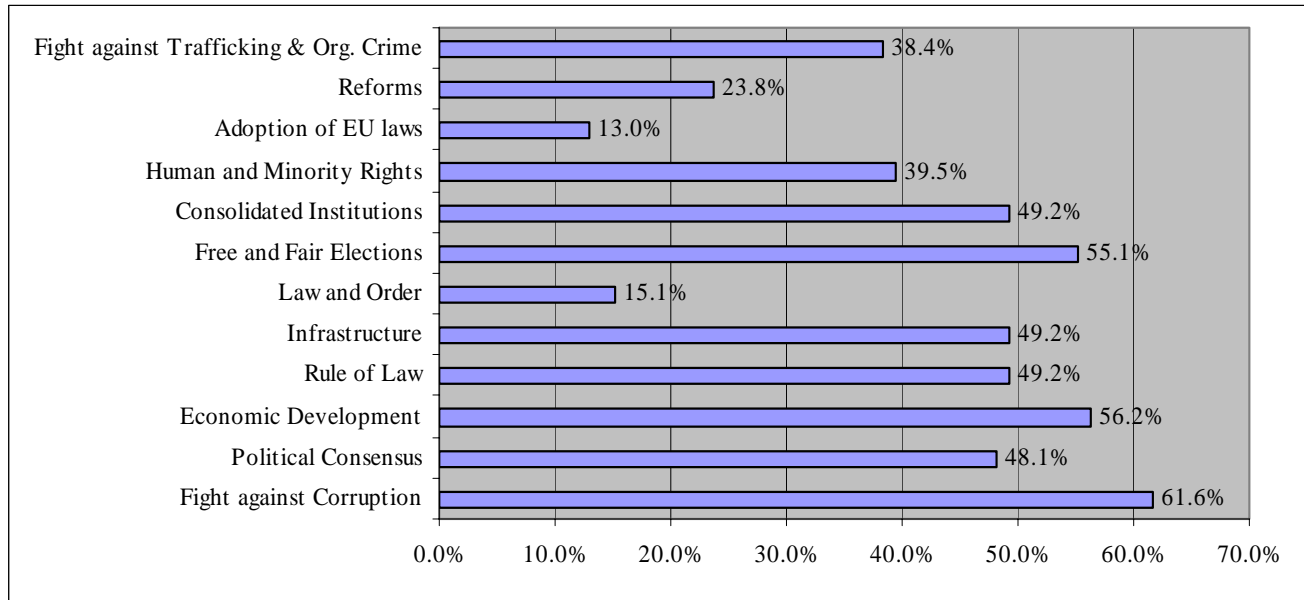
Figures 8, 9, and 10 show the top conditions mentioned by respondents classified by those that estimate Albania’s progress so far to be “fast”, “slow”, and “very slow.” It is

noteworthy that while all groups mention the fight against “corruption” as a top condition of the European Union, those that are more optimistic on Albania’s progress mention “political consensus” as the second most important condition while the more pessimistic respondents mention “economic development” as the second most important factor. *That is, the considerable economic gap between Albania and the EU is directly related to pessimism over Albania’s progress towards EU integration.* Interestingly, the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* was rated as the least important condition across the board. This may be closely related to not only the emphasis that Albanian politics and EU structures have put on the more political aspects of integration or the easily perceived gap in economic development, but also to the lack of information and informed debate on such an important aspect of integration as the adoption of the EU legislative framework. *While the adoption of EU laws is expected to change the way Albanians relate to their institutions, respondents are either unaware or underestimate its importance in Albania’s progress towards the EU.*

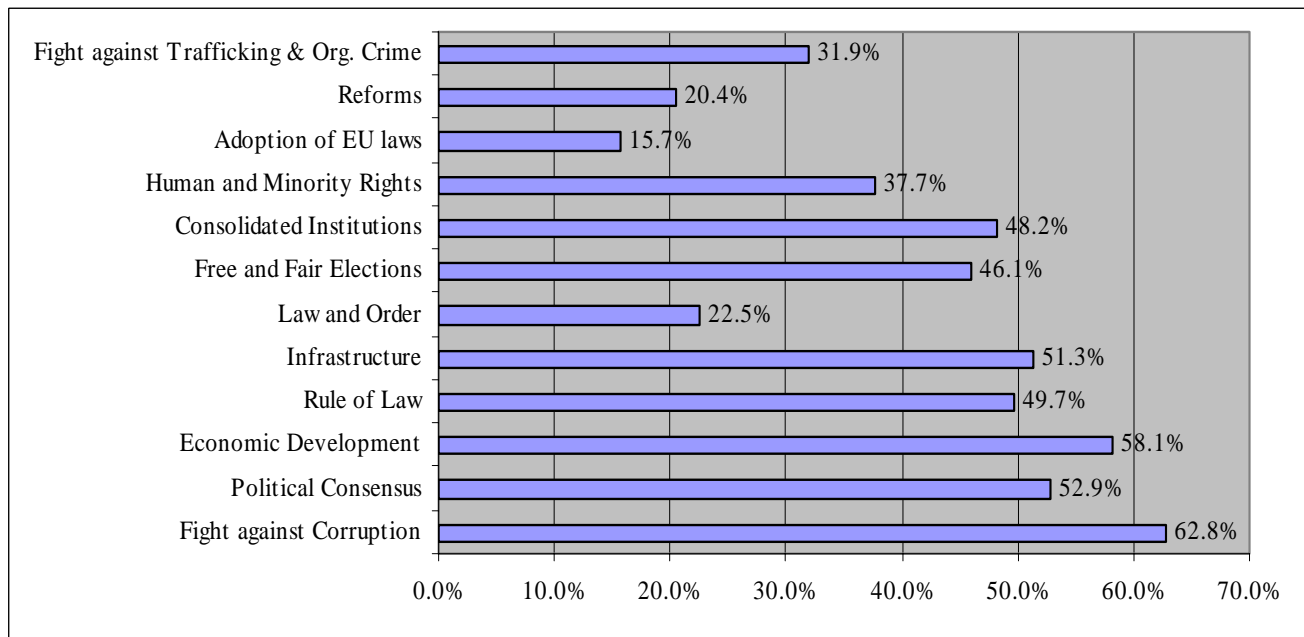
**Figure 8: Albania is Progressing “Fast” vs. EU Conditionality**



**Figure 9: Albania is Progressing Slowly vs. EU Conditionality**



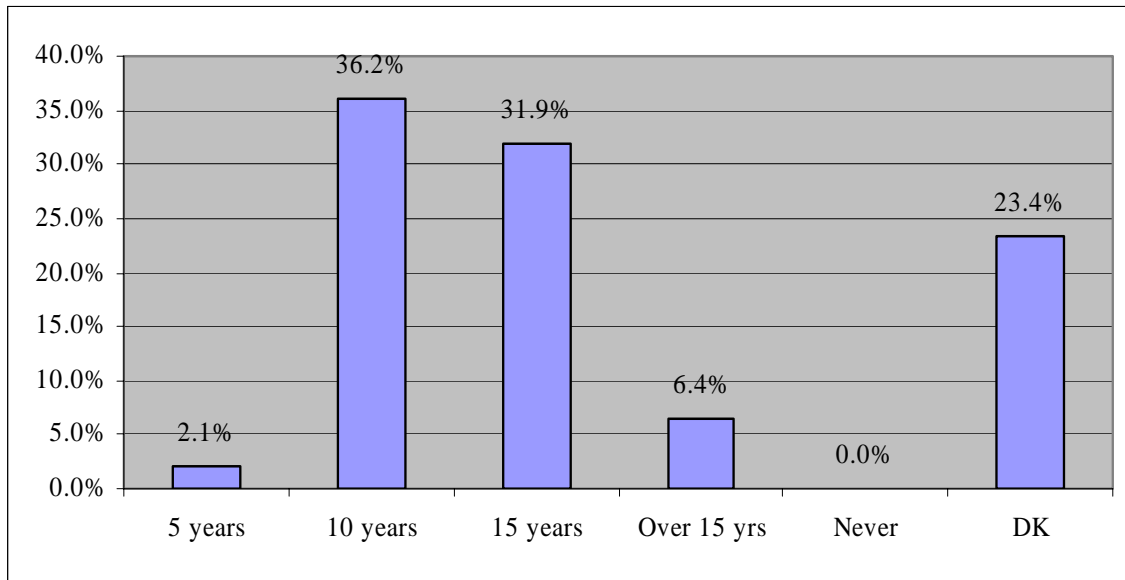
**Figure 10: Albania is Progressing Very Slowly vs. EU Conditionality**



When asked about the speed of Albania’s integration process, most of the respondents answered that the process was moving either slowly (37.7 %) or very slowly (39.10 %). Moreover, when they were asked to assess the number of years that it will take Albania to join EU, the majority of respondents answered 10 (36.44 %) or 15 years (33.11 %). In order to understand respondents’ definitions of “fast” and “slow”, we combined questions 19 and 20 (see ANNEX 1: Questionnaire).

Figure 11 shows the definition of “fast” in terms of years for those respondents that believe Albania’s EU integration process is proceeding at a fast pace. Compared to 2005, even those that perceive Albania’s integration in the EU to be fast do not expect the country to integrate before 10 years. While in 2005 almost 80 percent of these respondents thought Albania would gain membership within 10 years, in 2006 the percentage is half of that or almost 40 percent. This is the most pessimistic definition of “fast” that AIIS has encountered since the *Perceptions and Realities* survey was first carried out in 2002.

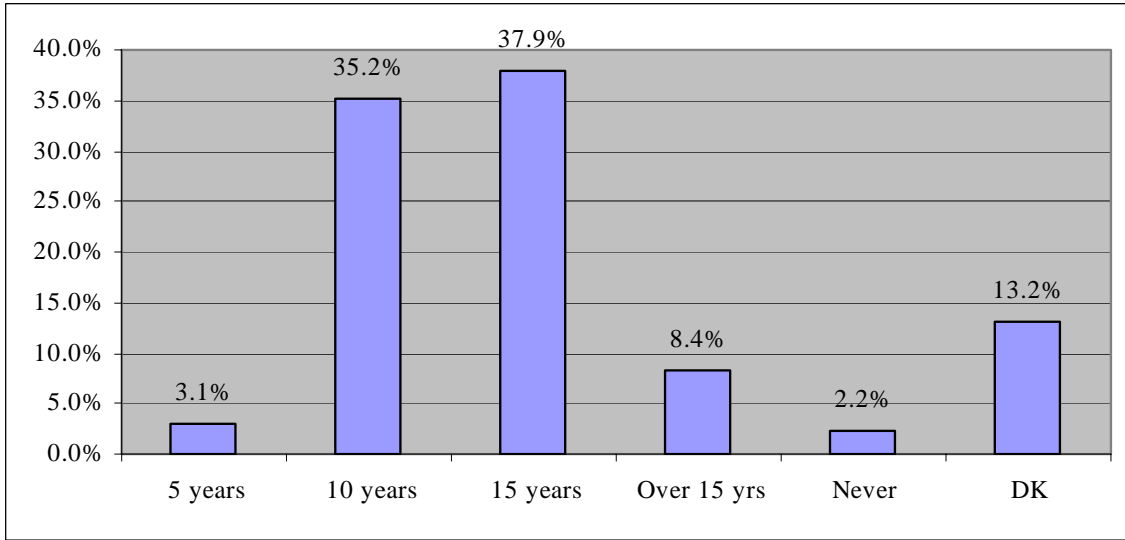
**Figure 11: The Answers “Fast” vs. the Number of Years Albania will need to Integrate in EU**



Similarly, in Figure 12 we combined the answers of the respondents that think that the process is moving slowly with their estimate on the number of years that it will take Albania to get EU membership. For the first time, we know that there is hardly any difference in terms of “fast” or “slow” progress judgments in terms of years. While it is true that those that perceive Albanian progress to be “slow” tend to be more in the “15 years” and “over 15 years” categories than those that perceive progress to be “fast”, this difference is negligible. The responses for “very slow” follow a similar trend and thus we are not including that picture here. That is, *despite the subjective judgments of respondents on the pace of Albanian progress, respondents are getting more unified over time in their absolute estimation of the length of the process.*

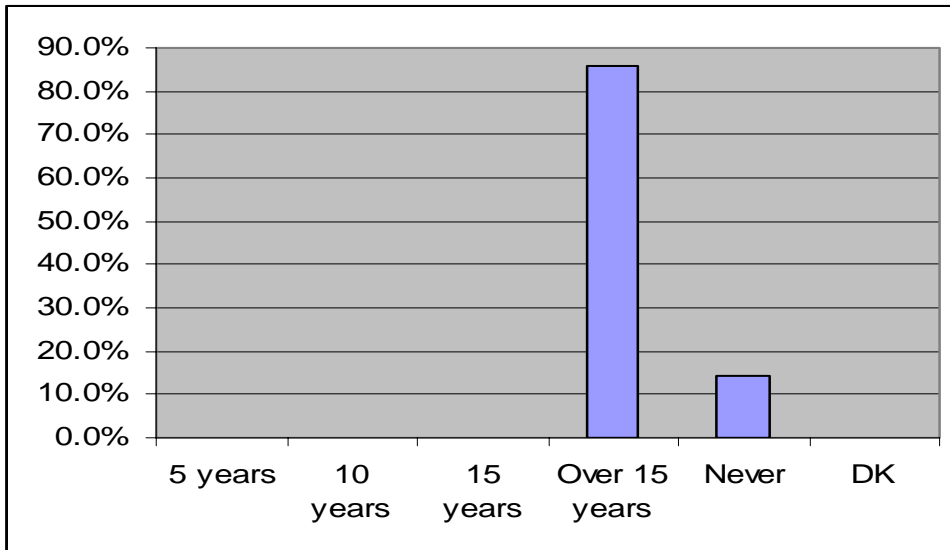
**Figure 12: The Answers “Slow” in terms of Years**





In order to assess whether there is a correlation between more pessimistic expectations and those respondents that are against EU membership, we combined this group with the number of years they thought necessary for the country’s EU accession in *Figure 13*. *It is clear that there is a positive correlation between the level of pessimism and the level of support for Albania’s EU membership.* There are no respondents that believe that Albania may become a member within 5 or 10 years that are against EU membership. The overwhelming majority, 85.7 %, believe that Albanian membership will come over 15 years later while the rest believe Albania will never become a member. *It may be that the vote against membership comes solely from those that do not believe that the prospect of membership is a realistic one rather than any conscious Euroskepticism.*

**Figure 13: Pessimism and EU Support: Respondents “against” EU Membership vs. Expectations in terms of Years**

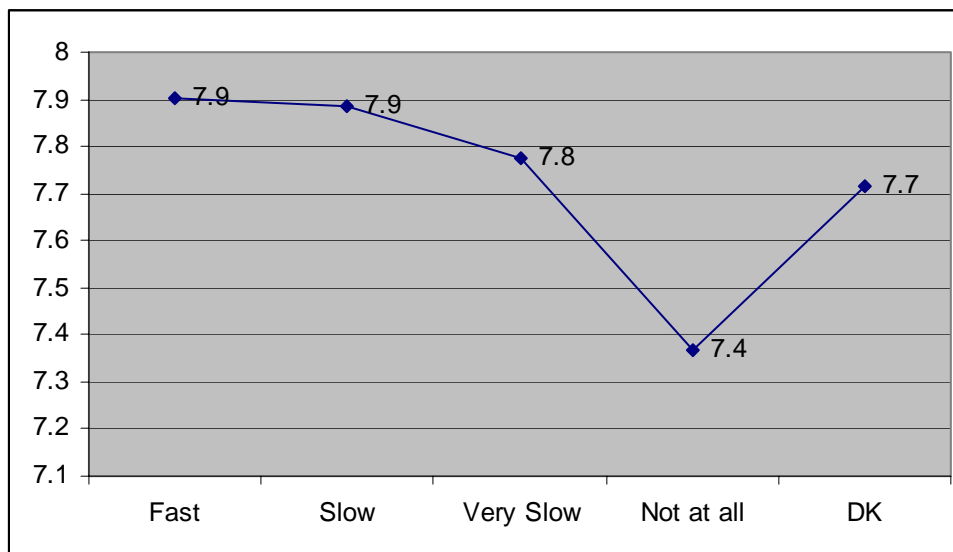


## Perceptions of European Union and Benefits of Membership

As it has been shown in the Findings section, respondents continue to hold the EU in very high regard. They perceive it as a very important strategic partner of the Albanian government and as a democratic organization that preserves peace and stability in the continent and helps the cause of democracy in other countries. Finally, over 90 percent of respondents support Albania's membership in the EU.

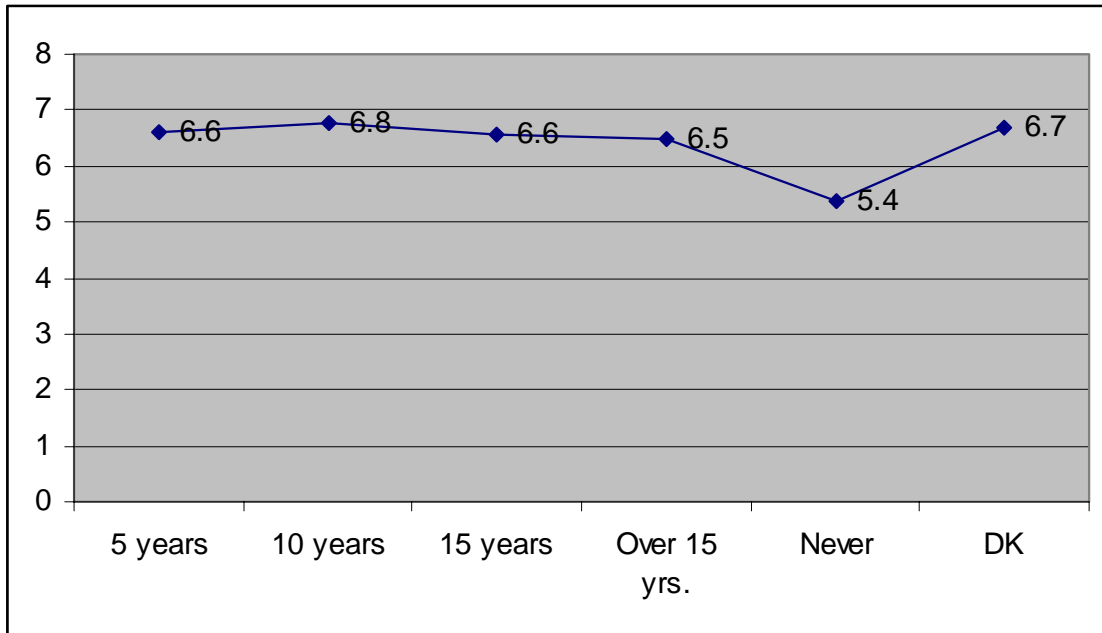
Figure 14 shows that the more optimistic respondents are on the speed of Albania's progress towards membership, the higher they estimate the benefits of EU membership for the country. The benefits of EU membership were calculated as the mean of the answers to Question 21 where they were asked to rate Albania's benefits from the perspective of democratic development, economic development, living standards, rule of law and free movement. Nevertheless, except for those respondents that do not see any progress at all, it is clear that even the respondents that evaluate Albania's progress to be very slow still estimate the benefits of membership quite highly.

**Figure 14: Perceptions of Membership Benefits in Relation to Membership Expectations (Question 19 vs. 21)**



On the other hand, the weak positive relationship between membership benefits and perceived progress towards membership is further diluted when we consider perceptions of the EU by respondents that rate the speed of Albania's integration differently. Perceptions of the EU were calculated as the total mean of answers across all categories in Question 8. Figure 15 shows that perceptions of the EU are not dependent on how respondents rate Albania's progress towards membership. This is a similar result to the 2005 and the 2002 surveys. It seems that the respondents that estimate the process to last 10 or 15 years base their estimate simply on their perceptions of the gap between Albania and Europe.

**Figure 15: EU Perceptions in Relation to Membership Expectations (Question 21 vs. Question 8)**



## VII. ANNEX I - Questionnaire

**ALBANIAN INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (AIIS)**

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E-mail: [aiis@albaniaonline.net](mailto:aiis@albaniaonline.net)

Website: <http://www.aiis-albania.org>

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ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Date of the Interview \_\_\_\_\_

### Questionnaire

Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS), with the financial support of **SOROS Foundation** and the **Balkan Trust for Democracy**, is conducting an opinion poll in order to assess Albanians' perceptions on the European Union and Albania's EU integration. You have been randomly selected for this purpose. Your participation is voluntary, your name and answers will remain anonymous. Even if you begin this interview you can stop at any time you want. The entire conversation will take approximately 10 minutes.

P1. Are you ready to begin?

- Yes GO TO THE NEXT SECTION AND BEGIN THE INTERVIEW
- No GO TO QUESTION 2

P2. If this is not the right time could I come back at a more convenient time for you?

- Yes WRITE DOWN TIME AND PLACE
- No GREET AND LEAVE

#### General Information

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Initially I would like to ask some general questions that will help us analyze the data according to social and age group criterion.

1. WRITE DOWN THE GENDER OF THE INTERVIEWEE

- 1.  MALE
- 2.  FEMALE

2. Where are you employed? Are you employed in the Central Government Public Administration, Local Government Public Administration, private business sector, Non Governmental Organization (NGO), in the Media, or elsewhere?

Central Government Public Administration	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Local Government Public Administration	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Business	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Non Governmental Organization (NGO)	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Media	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Other, specify _____	99 <input type="checkbox"/>

3. What kind of education have you completed? Did you graduate from secondary school, high school, university or did you complete postgraduate studies?

Secondary School	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
High School	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
University	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Post Graduate Studies	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

4. What is your age group? Are you 18-25, 26-35, 36-55, or older than 55 years old?

18 – 25 years old	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
26- 35 years old	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
36 – 55 years old	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Over 55 years old	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

General Information on EU

Now I would like to talk with you generally about a number of international organizations.

5. Have you heard of the following organizations?

1	NATO	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No
2	OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No
3	UN (United Nations)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No
4	IMF (International Monetary Fund)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No
5	World Bank	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No
6	European Union (EU)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No
7	World Trade Organization (WTO)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No
8	Council of Europe	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No

6. Now I will mention a few organizations and I will ask you if Albania is a member or not. Is Albania member of:

1	NATO	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
2	OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
3	UN (United Nations)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW

4	European Union (EU)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
5	World Trade Organization (WTO)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
6	Council of Europe	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW

7. Different people have different opinions regarding the states/organizations with which Albania needs to strengthen its ties. In your opinion how much attention should our government pay to strengthening Albania's ties with the following states/organizations? Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the higher the number the more you think our Government should pay attention to strengthening Albania's ties with the given state/organization.

SHOW CARD 1 AND REPEAT QUESTION

1	European Union (EU)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	NATO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	UN (United Nations)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	Italy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Greece	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Germany	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	France	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8	USA	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	Great Britain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	Turkey	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	Macedonia	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12	Serbia	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13	Croatia	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14	Montenegro	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15	Kosovo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16	Other, specify _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

8. Now I will read some statements about EU and I will ask you to what extent you agree with them. Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the higher the number the more you agree with the given statement.

SHOW CARD 2 AND REPEAT QUESTION

1	EU is a democratic organization	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	EU is a source of peace and security in Europe	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	EU promotes democracy in countries outside EU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	EU promotes economic development of countries outside EU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	EU is open to accept any European country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

9. The European Union was established in order to achieve certain goals. In your opinion how important are the following goals for EU. Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the higher the number the more you think the given goal important for EU.

SHOW CARD 3 AND REPEAT QUESTION.

1	The economic development of the member states	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Democracy in the member states	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	EU Enlargement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	The defense of Europe	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

10. From what you have heard which of the following is an EU institution?

1	The European Parliament	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
2	World Bank	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
3	The European Commission	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
4	IMF (International Monetary Fund)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
5	The Committee of the Regions	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
6	NATO	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
7	European Investment Bank (EIB)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW



8	The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
9	Council of Europe	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
10	OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW
11	The Stability Pact	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	2 <input type="checkbox"/> No	99 <input type="checkbox"/> DON'T KNOW

*EU Integration Process*

Now we will talk for a few minutes about the relations of our country with EU.

11. Suppose tomorrow there was a referendum on Albania's membership in EU? How would you vote? Would you vote for the membership or against Albania's membership in EU?

- 1.  For
- 2.  Against                      GO TO QUESTION 13
- 99.  DON'T KNOW              GO TO QUESTION 14

12. What is the main reason behind your "FOR" vote:

Living standards will improve	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Free movement in EU	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Strengthening democracy and the rule of law	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Albanian economy will progress	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Other, specify _____	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
DON'T KNOW	99 <input type="checkbox"/>

13. What is the main reason behind your "AGAINST" vote:  
(ONLY FOR THOSE WHO WOULD VOTE AGAINST)

Living standards will worsen	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
It will weaken the position of Albanian business	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
It will jeopardize the Albanian identity	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
We will become too dependent on Brussels	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Other, specify _____	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
DON'T KNOW	99 <input type="checkbox"/>

14. Do you think Albania is ready to become a member of EU?

- 1.  Yes                      GO TO QUESTION 16
- 2.  No
- 99.  DON'T KNOW

15. Do you think EU should admit Albania even before it is ready to become a member of EU?

- 1.  Yes
- 2.  No
- 99.  DON'T KNOW

16. Albania is trying to become a member of NATO as well as of EU. Which of these organizations will Albania join first? Will it join first NATO or EU?

- 1.  NATO
- 2.  EU
- 99.  DON'T KNOW

17. If Albania is to become a member of EU it has to meet certain criterion. Have you heard of these criterions?

1.  Yes

2.  No

GO TO QUESTION 19

18. Please name some of the criterion you have heard of:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

19. There exist a variety of opinions on the speed with which Albania's integration into EU is taking place. In your opinion how is Albania's integration into EU taking place? Is it taking place fast, slow, very slow or is it not moving at all?

Fast	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Slow	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Very Slow	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Not moving at all	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
DON'T KNOW	99 <input type="checkbox"/>

20. There also exist different opinions on the time that will be needed for Albania to become a member of EU. How long do you think it will take for Albania to become a member of EU? Will it take 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, more than 15 years or do you think that Albania will never become a member of EU?

5 years	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
10 years	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
15 years	3 <input type="checkbox"/>

More than 15 years	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Albania will never become a member of EU	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
DON'T KNOW	99 <input type="checkbox"/>

21. People have different opinions on the benefits that Albania will derive from EU membership. In your opinion how much will Albania benefit in the following areas? Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the greater the number the more you think Albania will benefit in the given area.

SHOW CARD 4 AND REPEAT QUESTION

1	Democratization	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Economic Development	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	Wellbeing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	Strengthening of the rule of law	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Free movement in EU countries	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Other, specify _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

22. Albania's membership into EU depends on a variety of factors. In your opinion how important are the following factors. Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the greater the number the more important you think the given factor is for Albania to become an EU member.

SHOW CARD 5 AND REPEAT QUESTION

1	Albanian Politics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Albanian Economy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	The situation in the region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	EU's stand towards Albania	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Albania's religious composition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Corruption	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	The progress of the decentralization process	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

8	Organized crime and trafficking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	Failure of the rule of law functioning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	Free and fair elections	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	Other, specify _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

23. To the best of your knowledge, has Albania signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with EU?

- 1.  Yes
- 2.  No
- 99.  DON'T KNOW

24. In your opinion, the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement for Albania means:

Candidate status	1 <input type="checkbox"/>
A new contractual relationship with EU	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Nothing special	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Other, specify _____	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
DON'T KNOW	99 <input type="checkbox"/>

Sources of Information on EU

25. A number of sources offer information on EU. How much information do you receive on EU from the following sources? Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the greater the number the more information you receive from the given source. SHOW CARD 6 AND REPEAT QUESTION.

1	Television	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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2	Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	Internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	EU Delegation to Albania	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Ministry of European Integration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	Workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8	Embassies/International Organizations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	Think tanks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	Other, specify _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

26. Please evaluate the level of responsibility for each of the following institutions with regard to informing on EU and European integration related issues. Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale, bearing in mind that the greater the number the more responsible you consider the institution.

SHOW CARD 7 AND REPEAT QUESTION

1	Central Government	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Local Government	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	EU (EC Delegation in Tirana)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	NGOs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Media	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Other, specify: _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

27. Are you interested to receive more information on EU?

1.  Yes

2.  No

FINISH THE INTERVIEW.

28. The information on EU covers a variety of areas. How much would you be interested to receive information on EU in the following areas? Please evaluate in a 1 to 10 scale,

bearing in mind that the greater the number the more interested you are to receive information in the given area.

SHOW CARD 8 AND REPEAT QUESTION

1	EU economy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	EU History	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	EU Policies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	EU Institutions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Cultural and artistic activities in EU	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	EU's role in the international arena	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	EU enlargement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8	Other, specify_____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Thank you very much for your time. If you are interested we will send you a copy of the conclusions of this survey.